



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600048133Q

35.

339.





PENRUDDOCK.

—

VOL. I.





PENRUDDOCK,

A TALE.

25

BY

THE AUTHOR OF 'WALTZBURG.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

WHITTAKER & CO., AVE MARIA LANE.

1835.



339.

LONDON
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES,
Duke Street, Lambeth.

PENRUDDOCK.

CHAPTER I.

All-conquering heat, oh, intermit thy wrath,
And on my throbbing temples potent thus
Beam not so fierce.

———In vain I sigh,
And restless turn and look around for night:
Night is far off, and hotter hours approach.

IN the year 18—, the month of June was literally a summer month, genuine summer, burning days, and oppressive nights. The scorching rays of the sun darted on the London flags with a fervency not usual to our northern climate, and certainly not congenial to many of the numerous gentry who, being accustomed to mansions sufficient to hold half a village, were now most inconveniently residing in the small tenements that, by the courtesy of the auctioneer,

are termed mansions in London, though the ground they occupy might be taken from some nobleman's hall in the country and leave good space behind. Here the nobility and gentry are obliged, by the caprice of fashion, to remain inhaling a combination of every thing injurious to health; while their parks, pleasure-grounds, and gardens are exhibiting every charm of nature, and "redolent of sweets." How far more lovely is the violet, just peeping from its velvet bed, in the full flush of beauty and fragrance, to the close-packed, and half-crushed bunches that are conveyed to the metropolis—purple balls, without either beauty or fragrance!

There were, no doubt, many of the country families, now congregated together in London, who would gladly have sought their sylvan homes, and who bewailed the long debates that kept the members of Parliament still employed, without hope or expectation of their labours being terminated. Even in the last week of July there appeared no probability of so de-

sirable an event as the prorogation, and there was no hope of change in the weather—still hot and dry. However people may desire and appreciate the delight of a warm climate, few would willingly encounter the sultry aspect of the dog-star in the crowded streets of London; and in this particular summer, Folly might not only “talk of” but see “cloudless skies.” The deep blue of the heavens was more than mortal man could bear, without complaining of too much sunshine. The corn was ripe for the sickle, but the labourers fainting with heat could but slowly obey the commands of their employers.—The meadows were parched; deep rents and cracks rendering the ground unpleasant, if not unsafe, for the careless stroller.—The farmers prayed for rain,—the citizens gasped for it,—and the brute beast panted for the cooling shower; but no cooling shower relieved the feverish heat; no reviving drops fell on the dusty hedges by the road-side, no longer green, but exactly resembling in colour the ground

over which the travellers were slowly riding, inhaling more earth than air.

With all this heat and discomfort, London was still full; the middle classes were as quiet as their avocations would permit, remaining peaceably at home, and sighing for the time to arrive when they might solace their exhausted frames, and seek that coolness and freshness at the sea-side, which were not to be found in an overgrown city.

The higher circles relinquished their rides and drives in Hyde Park and other favourite places for exercise, but they made no alteration in their evenings' amusement. Those who could not leave the sofa, and were scarcely able to speak or breathe during the sultry hours of a fashionable morning, would contrive to show themselves at three or four parties in the evening. The lower ranks of the community are very apt to envy their superiors. When wearied with labour, they perceive the splendid equipages of the gentry rolling smoothly and rapidly

along; but it may be questioned whether in the London "season" the aristocracy do not undergo more fatigue than labourers who work for their daily bread. It really was astonishing at this period to observe how many lovely and delicate women were enabled to bear the heat of the crowded apartments, where the sultry air turned ice to cream before it could reach the mouth, while the cold refreshments followed the general example, and became hot.

The votaries of dissipation and fashion set Sirius at defiance.—Waltzes, mazourkas, and gallopades were the order of the night, or rather morning :

"The cool, the silent, and the fragrant hour,"

in which the poet so sweetly invites his mistress to partake

"——the wildly-devious morning walk,
The hour to meditation due and sacred song ;"

these balmy hours were passed by the *élite* in splendid rooms filled almost to suffocation.

But even pleasure will satiate and tire; and there were many, who commenced the season with every inclination to enjoy the various amusements of the gayest circles, who were now fairly tired out. No one had enjoyed the brilliant *soirées* with more zest than Walter Rayland, the son of a country gentleman, who was detained in town with his family by the Parliament. The young man had entered with more than usual glee into every party of pleasure, and his cheerful disposition rendered him acceptable to all the promoters of gaiety; but few would have given him credit for being in any way a disciple of Momus, had they listened to his querulous complaints, while reclining, or, more properly speaking, extended at full length, on a couch, he exclaimed against the heat, the balls, the dinners, Parliament, and London altogether; while his sister listened patiently, and occasionally strove with music and conversation to charm away his ill humour. Her efforts failed; and at length, tired

for my daily food these hands should cater, content with roots and herbs——”

“How would you procure those roots?” inquired Flora, interrupting her brother in the midst of his tirade. “You cannot dig.”

“I could learn,” was the reply.

“You! you! It would be amusing to see you with your sleeves tucked up, your hands covered with mould and scratched with briars and brambles—those delicate hands you are so proud of exhibiting. I should have some difficulty in recognising my fastidious brother, who piques himself on having all things in order; desiring soft couches and warm rooms, furnished in the most fashionable style;—a lodge in a wilderness would suit you vastly! Put on a forester’s dress this evening, fancy the ever-greens oaks, and the flowers beeches, or any other stately tree that you may prefer. It only requires a little imagination to make a ‘lady seem a knight,’ and there will be no difficulty in converting the pretty girls at Dunder House into dryads and sylphs of the forest. But I

shall enjoy the ball with all its plain reality; and as it is full time for me to think of dressing, I will leave you to get rid of your philosophy. We shall meet at the gay scene, for you will not be ready to go with us." So saying, Flora left the room, and Walter, stretched on a sofa, remained musing on the stupidity of fashionable parties.

The clock struck eleven, soon after the carriage rolled away with Flora Rayland and her mother. Another hour passed, and Walter made no attempt to relinquish his recumbent posture, and there most probably he would have lingered till too late for any party, had not a thundering rap absolutely raised him from the sofa, but only to fall on it with increased determination of not leaving it again that night, when, to his great annoyance, three young men in fancy dresses entered the room, exclaiming at him for not being prepared for the duke's festivity.

"I'm sorry you took all this trouble for me,"

said Walter; "but really I feel no inclination to leave my present comfortable quarters for such nonsense—a ball in the dog-days! Why I can scarcely breathe in this suite of rooms, which I have had the last two hours to myself; what would become of me in the immense crowd at Dunder House, with lamps, servants, supper, and everything disagreeable to increase the heat, which is even now suffocating, without taking the trouble to dance ourselves into a fever?"

"Well, don't talk yourself into a fever," said Lionel Delaval, laughing. "You are already quite red with the exertion; there can be no necessity for putting yourself in a ferment about the matter."

"Ferment! how is it possible to be otherwise when my blood is nearly at boiling heat. I almost anticipate a brain fever or an attack of hydrophobia."

"Nonsense," returned another of the party; "you have got a fit of the spleen, which the Duke's supper and the pretty girls there will

soon drive away. So be quick, get ready, and we will soon disperse these dolefuls."

"No, no," returned Walter. "You are all in high spirits. You will enjoy the amusement; but I—verily, as I told Flora just now, 'my spirit loathes such vanity.'"

"On my life," said Philip Deverel, "he is going to turn methodist; he has had a call; say, shall we throw off our trappings and listen to a discourse from the worthy and pious Mr. Walter Rayland?"

"Be serious, Deverel. I really am not well."

"You are only suffering from the heat," said Mr. Trevallian, another of the young men who had not yet spoken; "do not disappoint us because you are experiencing the general effect of the weather; only exert yourself, this languor will soon go off, and we shall have double enjoyment if you are with us."

"This is all very fine; as if my absence would interfere either with your comfort or your enjoyment," returned Walter, in a peevish tone.

"We have been companions so long," said

Delaval, "that we certainly have more pleasure when you join our society than when you are absent. We may say this without being accused of flattery."

"Well, as you are all so civil, I suppose I must comply; but, in sober sadness, I wish you had forgotten me just now."

"But, as we have not, be grateful for our remembrance, and dress as quickly as possible."

Walter Rayland submitted to the wishes of his companions, and they proceeded to Dunder House.

It is no uncommon event for persons who have been long anticipating some festivity, some day that is to be enjoyed at the time, and to be remembered as a bright and brilliant era, to be disappointed—disappointment is the lot of man from the time of Seged to the present day; and numbers, like the Ethiopian emperor, have mourned the presumption which led them to say, "this shall be a day of happiness;" but it is not so generally the case when their hopes and expectations are, like Walter Rayland's,

below zero. They are then sometimes agreeably surprised with a day of pleasure when it is least expected. It was not so, however, with our young fashionables, who, with *one* exception, returned from the fancy-ball tired and dissatisfied with the whole of the entertainment, and exclaiming against the insipidity of life, its cares and vexations; nor would they allow that the fault might be in themselves. They were satiated with pleasure,—they had yet to discover that happiness is in the mind,—that externals may increase but cannot give it. The only pleasurable event of the evening was planning an excursion on the water for the next day, when the tide would suit for Richmond.

At the appointed time, they were all assembled in their water uniform. In addition to those who formed the party of the preceding evening, they were joined by a young baronet, *Sir Arthur Clifford*. The weather was, as it had been for some weeks, intensely hot, which did not diminish the lassitude that crept over the fresh-water sailors, who pulled and toiled,

without advancing more than two miles an hour. The shores of Richmond were at last gained; but the dinner at the Star and Garter was out of the question, if they wished to save the tide, and to return against tide with the thermometer at eighty was an impossibility. For the sake of being independent, they had declined the assistance of watermen and domestics; they now felt, and most of them for the first time, how useful such persons can be. Their *only* method of escaping starvation was to rest at some river-side public-house or inn, and procure refreshment, to be eaten in the boat. The cold meat of the tavern was rejected with abhorrence; they could not touch a joint cut and hacked by every person who had previously dined; to their great comfort, they procured some tolerable wine and fresh-baked biscuits, with which they professed themselves satisfied, and taking advantage of the tide, they proposed to let their four-oared cutter float down with the returning waters.

"And if it float us to the salt sea," said

"Why you were so engaged with Flora Rayland," returned Deverel, "that you were insensible to all save her; we guess how that flirtation will end:—' wilt thou, Reginald, have this woman Flora to thy wedded wife? ' It will be all over with you—poor Trevallian."

"All over with me! I only wish such may be my fate. But seriously, I saw nothing to complain of or lament in our evening's amusement."

"All the better for you," answered Lionel; "for my part, I almost made a vow never to enter such a jumble of nonsense again. Broom-girls walking like empresses, and queens moving like—like what—like idiots, as they all were, to encounter such toil and trouble, worse than the witches' daily labour."

"You are doing the same thing," said Philip, laughing. "You are taking unnecessary pains, and talking yourself into a fever, to tell us what we all witnessed."

"Well," said Lionel, "I really am so tired and so hot, I must talk to cool myself. When,

when will Parliament have done prosing, that our good fathers may be released from strife, contention, and discord ! ”

“ When that happy time arrives you will have no cause of complaint, either of heat or cold,” answered Trevallian.

“ What do you mean, that Parliament will never be up ? ”

“ O, yes, there will be an end to that, never fear ; but we shall always be saddled with strife, contention, and discord.”

“ Then we must make the best of these dire companions. Who was your pet last night, Deverel ? You always have a black swan to prate about.”

“ A white swan this time at any rate, fair and stately, but she is not a pet ; all I dance with are not favourites, as it proved last night.”

“ Much to our comfort,” said Lionel ; “ or we should now be doomed to listen to the praise of your flame ; so I truly rejoice that you are without one.”

"Why what the devil, Rayland! What are you about?" exclaimed Trevallian; "you nearly upset the boat."

"I quite forgot where I was; I fancied myself moralizing under the broad branches of the oaks, with the melancholy Jaques, when, alas, I can only wish for shade, and sigh; how I sigh for the greenwood tree;

'Oh, who will lie with me?'

"Why," returned Lionel, laughing, "I would certainly much rather be with you under the greenwood tree when you are in these jumping humours than in a four-oared cutter, where every poetic flight may send us to Davy Jones's locker."

"You are wrong there, Lionel," said Philip; "that said locker is in the sea; we need not fear it in the river, where Father Thames protects his votaries."

"I wish the old gentleman would send a breeze," said Walter. "Positively I will endure this no longer; and, as our wise elders do not

require my assistance to rule this realm of mighty fame, I will seek the woodland shade. Will you join me, boys? Listen, does not this tempt you?

‘ Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me?
There shall he find no enemy
But winter and rough weather.’

What do you say? Shall we enact the good Duke and his compeers? Trevallian shall be his Highness; Clifford, the melancholy Jaques; Lionel, Orlando; and Deverel,—we must make a new character for him; no, he shall be Rosalind—‘ the chaste, the fair, the inexpressive she.’ Shall it be so arranged; what say you, my merry men?”

“ Say,” returned Trevallian, “ why that we should quarrel and fight for mere amusement before the end of a week.”

“ Will you try?” exclaimed Walter. “ I will order your forest habits, and we will start directly.”

"Stop," said Philip, "remember you are not on firm land. Father Thames may play you a watery trick."

"But answer; will any of you accompany me? for I am determined on making the exchange, from this murky heat, to the pure ether of the forest."

"I would not object," said Sir Arthur Clifford, "to join in a frolic if we could insure fine weather; but there are such things as rain and wind, frost and snow."

"They are not 'so unkind as man's ingratitude,'" replied Walter, in a mock heroic style.

"Very true," observed Lionel; "but we have no cause to complain of man's ingratitude; had it been woman's indeed, why then——"

"No cause of complaint!" interrupted Walter. "Why, did not that wretch Hoby delay sending home my new pumps, obliging me to visit the pretty Lady Jane with shoes out of shape? and did not Stultz refuse to make me a coat in an hour and a quarter? Don't you call that

ingratitude, when I have dealt with him, ay, and paid him too, for many a long year?"

"Perhaps you made him wait many a long year before you did bless him with a sight of pounds, shillings, and pence," said Deverel.

"Indeed I did not; and when you come to be Chancellor, you will do well to enact a law forbidding all personal decorators to use the word impossible. Never seek to vindicate man from the charge of ingratitude; but tell me when you will be ready to join my summer camp, where

'We may find sermons in stones, and good in everything.'"

"I imagine we shall not expend much time in seeking those said sermons."

"Do be serious," said Walter, "and say, will you or will you not? According to the form of speech now much in vogue, as many as are of that opinion say ay, the contrary opinion say no; the ayes have it—carried *nem. con.*," continued Walter, rubbing his hands with glee.

"Bravo, boys; now when shall we start, and where?"

"Where? why home," said Lionel; "so be still if you please, Walter, and we will row you softly over 'Thames' tide.'"

"Indeed you will do no such thing, till we have arranged the how and the when. Shall we haste to Sherwood, and 'seek the bower of Robin Hood?' Do leave the oars alone, Phil, till this weighty point is decided."

"We may return to Richmond," observed Clifford, "and rusticate among the groves of Sheen."

"To have all the cits of London gaping at us. No, no, we must seek some real solitude; there are plenty of wild spots in England—Delamere, Dean, Inglewood, Sherwood, and the New Forest, among many others."

"If you will be satisfied with the New Forest," said Delaval, "my father has a hunting box in one of the wildest parts, where you may ruralize at pleasure."

"And have to pay our daily court to your lady mother? That will never do; we must be real foresters, with only Heaven's roof to shield our heads."

"Then I cry off," exclaimed Lionel.

"And I," said Sir Arthur.

"A leafy dome will be too cold for me," observed Trevallian.

"I fear," added Deverel, "it would be death to me after close quarters in Lincoln's Inn; think, my merry men, of a poor devil who has been dwelling in twelve feet square, and then exposed to the cold blast of evening. Verily my blood is chilled at the bare idea. I must also cut and run."

"What a set of spoiled children! who cannot sleep without thick curtains and carpeted rooms; but ye shall be humoured, we will have large canvass tents. I will only stipulate that they shall not be ornamented marquees."

"I believe, Rayland," said Sir Arthur, laughing, "if we came to the point, you would

think more of decoration than the rest of the party."

"We may arrange the interiors as we please, Rayland?"

"Why, yes; there will be no harm in that, certainly; if we have tents, we may as well have beds or mattresses."

"What the devil! did you intend we should sleep on the bare ground?" inquired Deverel.
"I should never live to be a Judge, let alone a Chancellor."

"True; I did not consider that; so we may as well have a few comforts; but be moderate; and now when shall we quit this smoky town—to-morrow or the next day?"

"Fair and softly, good Walter; we are not all so independent as you are. Come to-morrow and dine at my Chambers, and there we may settle all matters relating thereto in true lawyer style."

"What, to eat a beef-steak cooked by your laundress?" inquired Trevallian.

"No bad thing, I can tell you, by way of novelty," said Clifford; "I have often taken one with Philip."

"Well then, on your recommendation we will try one also," returned Trevallian.

"I only wish we may get as good in our forest home. Pray how are we to manage these matters? I can't live on roots and fruit," said Deverel.

"Oh, we'll take a cook with us. We must have good dinners, or how shall we pass our time?"

"Pass our time, Lionel! Why we'll muse under a tree, and philosophize."

"Like the melancholy Jaques," said Clifford; "we shall make rare philosophers, stipulating for warm tents and good dinners: but, as we have now talked ourselves cool, we had better take the oars, and row for Westminster."

"Then remember, Deverel, we will be with you at seven to-morrow."

[CHAPTER II.

Beside the dewy border let me sit,
All in the freshness of the humid air ;
There in that hollowed rock, grotesque and wild,
An ample chair, moss-lined, and overhead
By flowering umbrage shaded ; where the bee
Strays diligent, and with the extracted balm
Of fragrant woodbine loads his little thigh.

WHEN the party met at Deverel's chambers, Walter Rayland was gratified by finding they were more willingly inclined to his scheme, in consequence of the day being still one of oppressive heat, even more sultry than the preceding, when they were struggling with oars and tide.

" I begin to think, Rayland, that your forest sojourn will not be altogether disagreeable."

" Not altogether disagreeable ! why, Trevalian, it will be bliss ; and now dinner is over (and, by-the-by, I give my vote for Deverel's cook being invited to join our party), we will proceed to business. My first proposal is, that

we all subscribe a certain sum towards the needful requisites."

"Have mercy on my finances!" exclaimed Deverel.

"How much should you allow for your long vacation, Phil? our best way will be to follow a mess example, and each subscribe what we calculate on expending in a two months' excursion."

This proposal met the approbation of all. On casting up the sums named, they were perfectly satisfied with the amount, which they agreed would be more than sufficient even for luxuries. Fortunately for them, Deverel's cook willingly consented to undertake what might be required in the housekeeping department, if her husband and their only child, a boy of twelve years of age, might be allowed to accompany them; the woman very justly observed,

"They would want some one to wait on them; gentlemen like them could not black their own shoes."

Deverel here whispered Rayland,

"Will not clean shoes be out of character? had Robin Hood such fancies?"

The woman continued,

"The gentlemen would want their clothes brushed; her Jacob was used to such work, though he was such a mere boy. Indeed she could not leave them; they must all go, or she must remain and attend the other gentlemen; but if they all went, there were several women who would do duty in her absence."

This was decided to their mutual satisfaction, and it was agreed, to prevent a break-up of the party from whim, or any other cause save illness, that any one who left the rendezvous for any motive save as before stated (illness), should forfeit the sum of two hundred pounds, except Sir Arthur Clifford and the Honorable Reginald Trevallian, who, being both independent and possessed of large fortunes, were to have their forfeiture increased to one thousand pounds if they left the forest party before the expiration of

two months from the time of their reaching the destined place;—where that was, they had not yet decided. At length, after much consultation, it was settled that they should quit London on that day week, and take up their abode at the seat of Delaval, where they could easily fix on some suitable dell or dingle to erect their tents, and breathe the cool air for which they were languishing.

Three days after this arrangement, Walter Rayland entered the breakfast-room where his mother and sister were sitting, in the full fancy dress of a forester. The habit of Lincoln green, with buff boots, lace falling collar, and hunter's hat with feathers, belt and bugle, were all in keeping, and were most becoming; so thought Walter Rayland, and so thought his brother foresters, who were at the same time engaged in a similar examination at their respective dwellings.

Walter's mother and sister regarded him with admiration, while Flora exclaimed,

"Upon my word, Walter, you really do not look amiss ! "

"Is that all you can say ? I fancied myself superlative."

"And pray to what fancy ball are you proceeding at this early hour ? "

"To none, mother ; you know I hate such things."

"Then why have you 'donned this attire ? ' "

"Because I am going to turn forester while this infernal heat lasts."

"And where—in the Regent's Park or Kensington Gardens ? "

"In forest dell, and dingle green,
Where sweetly sleeps the Fairy Queen,"

replied Walter, in a theatrical voice and attitude.

"When you have done with this frolic, pray leave her Elfin Majesty where you find her ; bring none of such a frisky race here, Walter," said his mother, laughing.

"Why, would you not receive her ? Only

think what a 'lion' she would be at your next party!"

"A small attraction, if legends speak truth; but I am not like mamma, Walter; I should like to see her, with her diamond tiara and silver wings; only they must be so small, I fear we should want magnifiers. Pray when do you commence your tour to fairy land?"

"Next Thursday, and you will not see me again for two long months; that will not cause you much sorrow or care; but, Flora, there is a certain Mr. Trevallian, who is likewise bent on wooing Queen Mab; I give you warning, that you may prepare the willow."

"Mr. Trevallian has my full permission to fall in love as much as may please him; be it with sprite or sylph, it is all one to Flora Rayland."

"I wonder, Mother, you do not bring up your daughter with some regard to veracity; but good bye—one kiss, and I'm off. I have spoken to my father; he does not object to my

frolic ; he took the liberty of laughing though, which was not quite polite ; but he promised to keep my secret, so mind you do the same ; and, Flora, Queen Mab shall not run away with anybody but myself."

" But I thought you were not going till Thursday ? "

" I am first bound to Beechwood—Delaval's place. Oh, I forgot ; we are not to mention where we fix our camps ; so, remember and be silent respecting our destination. Once more, good bye."

On the first of August, three large commodious tents were raised in a retired part of the New Forest, but within four miles of a market-town, for the convenience of procuring food and other necessities. Besides the cart containing the marquees, there was a waggon, loaded with tables, and other requisites in the furniture way, not forgetting large reclining chairs, much to the amusement of Sir Arthur Clifford, who was infinitely entertained by the ideas conceived of a

forester's life. First, the ground was smoothed; there was no occasion to seek a dry spot, where all was parched with drought; then several folds of matting covered the whole of the enclosure, in the centre of which was placed a tolerably large Turkey carpet, a dining-table sufficiently wide and long to admit every "necessary," as Walter Rayland styled such trifling things as finger-glasses, decanters, water-goblets, and, above all, wine-coolers of massy silver; it was impossible to do without them. As there were five of them, they must have four dishes in their second course: they would be satisfied with only one sort of fish and one tureen of soup—they were determined to be regular foresters; but they must contrive to have ice, to make their champagne drinkable; fruit they could procure from the market town. Silver tea-service, with porcelain cups, a chiffonier loaded with elegantly-bound volumes, and some small rosewood tables, completed the furniture of the day tent. The marquee appropriated to repose contained five

camp beds ; this tent was remarkably large, and so contrived, that, by drawing curtains, it formed five separate apartments, for the comfort of having each a dressing-room ; at night the draperies were removed, leaving a large cool open chamber ; each bed had its distinct chest, containing the wardrobe of the owner. The third tent was for the laundress and her family, with another attached for a kitchen, in which there was every requisite, not merely to cook a steak, but to provide a dinner for a party of Aldermen.

"And now," said Walter Rayland, when all was arranged, "I think we may be comfortable."

"I think so indeed," answered Sir Arthur. "Why you have every luxury in the middle of the woodland shade !"

"Pretty well, considering ; we shall improve daily ; we have some more luggage coming."

"Ha, ha, ha ! and this you call a wild forest life," said Delaval ; "it's plaguy comfortable

though. I'd no idea Robin Hood and Little John were so well off in the world; but, Walter, man, there is one omission."

"What? tell me, and it shall be rectified."

"How are we to get venison? I fear we shall want the courage to dare the keeper; a jolly Monk of Copmanhurst would procure the necessary leave, or make it; but those days are past."

"Patience, boys; you don't know what we may do; but now in to our first dinner; then we will have 'The Chough and Crow,' in which all must join chorus, for verily this 'is our opening day.' So 'uprouse ye all, my merry, merry men,' and in to dinner."

A merry repast they made of it; the wine circulated briskly; song, jest, and glee succeeded each other in quick rotation. The opening of the tent was thrown back, admitting the light of the full moon as it shone through the boughs of the aged and splendid oaks that embellished the spot they had selected, and a more

lovely, though wild woodland glade could scarcely have been chosen or imagined.

"And now let me ask you all," said Walter,
"is not

'This life more sweet than that of painted
Pomp? Are not these woods more free
From peril than the envious Court?
Here feel we but the penalty of Adam.'

"We have not felt that yet," said Deverel,
laughing, "nor do we mean it. Before

'The seasons' difference or the icy fang
Of winter blows upon my body,'

I shall be snug in my twelve feet twelve, amid
musty parchments, enlivened by 'Coke upon
Littleton.' Would it were not so!"

"Truly this is a pleasant life," observed Sir
Arthur, "while this sultry sun continues we
may be well content; and when the wintry
winds blow chill and cold, why then we shall be
safe in our castled homes."

"Those will who have castled houses, Clif-
ford; we cannot all boast such splendid roofs;
for the present, I am perfectly happy with this
leafy dome o'ercanopied by Heaven."

"That's more than you can answer for, De-verel; the Elysian Fields may be in the moon for aught we know, and we do know that Madame Cynthia is not always above us."

"She is above us now, and looking so beautiful that I am tempted to leave this comfortable tent and sparkling wine to revel in her beams; so those who are for a moonlight stroll follow me," said Trevallian.

While the novelty lasted, our gentlemen foresters were enraptured with their freedom from the trammels of society; but occasionally a wish would break from one, which was usually echoed by the others, for the first of September. Still they were apparently amused, and if any of the party regretted the change from the metropolis, they concealed such thoughts from their companions; but they were not destined to remain long unnoticed and unknown. They had fixed their camp too near a market-town, never calculating the probability of their residence being reported to the worthy inhabitants of Benturn,

who were all on the *qui vive* when informed of the gentlemen gypsies, who were provided with a cook, butler, and footman, for so they designated poor little Jacob, and such in fact he was, footman and running boy to the whole establishment, every member of the party having full employment for him; and each secretly repented not having stipulated for his own servant. It was all very well at a distance to talk of being independent and above the cares and trouble of domestics, but they felt it a torment to have no apparatus spread for them on their first rising; Jacob was really clever, but he could not supply the place of five well-trained servants. Occasionally a congratulatory feeling occupied the mind of each that it was only for two months, and as no one chose to forfeit the penalty, nor acknowledge they had engaged in a mad frolic, they forbore expressing the half-formed wish of returning to their brick and mortar houses. But the curiosity of the Benturn people was intolerable; something must be done; they must

apply to the Magistrates to prevent all the grocers, bakers, and butchers of the town from surrounding their encampment every Sunday evening.

"I tell you there is no possible way of preventing these annoyances," said Philip Deverel. "This forest is as free to the whole world as it is to ourselves. You cannot compel the worthy burghers of Benturn to take the right path, when they are inclined to pursue the left; trust me, I have studied law long enough to find out there is no respect paid to lord or lordling in forest laws, unless they happen to be rangers, deputy rangers, or some way connected with them. You must either move your camp, or submit to be stared and gazed at, every day, and every hour of the day."

"But this is intolerable," observed Walter; "I am sure there were some hundreds yesterday peeping and prying as if we were wild beasts. I am not quite certain that their impertinent curiosity may not have the effect of turning me into some outlandish monster, ready to fly at

and bite the first person who may again annoy us by penetrating our solitude."

"It would have been better," said Delaval, "if you had taken my father's side of the forest. You might there have been ten miles or more from a town any way, scarcely a house within a mile or two; and if we were to proceed quietly, I'll engage you should have none of these nuisances, besides having a haunch occasionally from some of our keepers."

"But your lady mother, Mrs. Delaval?"

"She is far away, Rayland. I told you so before, only you would not attend. Beech Park will be deserted this summer, and there we may procure fruit and such like matters without raising any curiosity."

"I give my vote for an adjournment," said Deverel; "a camp is not like a walled city."

"True," replied Trevallian; "and my advice is, to depart at break of day; but, if we penetrate still deeper in the forest, we shall do well to dispense with some of our luxuries."

No sooner said than done. The mid-day sun

saw the spot where the gentlemen gipsies had harboured clear of all but a few fragments of broken furniture, and the spaces bare of turf where the tents had been fixed. When the Benturn worthies next visited the spot, the birds were flown; and after some hours of wonder and conjecture, the whole scene faded from the remembrance of those who had been amused by the merry gentlemen.

"There is nothing like experience," said Delaval, when they were again settled. "Now we know what we are about: this spot is fifteen miles or more from our last sojourn, and I'll engage for it we shall have no visitors—the few inhabitants are miles apart."

"But there is something like a park-paling beyond those shrubs."

"I believe we are near an old manor-house, belonging to a Mr. Penruddock; he is a singular character. I have heard my mother speak of *him* as suffering much grief from the loss of his wife, who died when I was a little boy. I

remember hearing of Mr. Penruddock's sorrow—almost distraction; but he will not interfere with our comfort; he seldom, if ever, goes beyond his own grounds. I never saw him, nor do I recollect having heard of any person who has within the last ten years."

Our young gentlemen had at last fixed on a spot suitable to their wishes, in the most retired part of the forest, where there were only a few straggling huts and a solitary farm-house within a circuit of ten miles, with the exception of the lone mansion of Mr. Penruddock, which was so surrounded with plantations as not to be visible from any part of the low fence by which the domain was surrounded; the inhabitants of the scattered dwellings were too much occupied with their daily avocations to bestow more than a passing thought on the encampment that had raised so much wonder and astonishment in the neighbourhood of Benturn.

Their present situation was no great distance from the sea, which would vary the scene as well

as create employment till the shooting season commenced, when all would be amusement. The gentle foresters had passed the space which is always visited by *ennui* and lassitude when the novelty of a new situation is worn off; that time was over—they were now domesticated, and really did enjoy their woodland home. The weather still continued warm, even sultry; but the shade of the mighty oaks and splendid beeches gave coolness and comfort to the gypsy camp.

A week passed; they were now on the eve of the grand sporting day, with ample licence to range at will. Guns were examined, cleaned, and tried; dogs were brought to the tents with a keeper to attend them; and our young friends were taking wine after their early dinner—they had wisely decided not to keep London hours; and they were in full conversation respecting their approaching sport, which, like all other subjects, was at last nearly exhausted, when Sir Arthur inquired of Delaval the name of the surrounding estate?

"Astol Manor."

"And is that old mansion the dwelling of the Mr. Penruddock you mentioned, Lionel?"

"It is."

"Clifford and I had a peep at it this morning," said Deverel; "and by my faith, I think it was built in the first year of Adam; or, at any rate, it must have been planned by Noah after the flood."

"Or by one of Queen Elizabeth's primitive nobles or gentlemen, for so the story goes."

"Do you mean to assert, Lionel, that yonder odd, quaint, in-and-out sort of a building was not standing before the time of bonny Bess, of roast-beef notoriety? Oh no, it must have been a flood affair; or, if not, it was erected in the Conqueror's reign—perhaps it was his hunting-seat; and he wishing to conciliate all those who came with him, his native subjects, and all those who remained of the old robber-chiefs who came before him, as well as the remnant of the aborigines, had it compounded and moulded by

Roman, Saxon, Danish, and Norman architects, and above all, the old native Britons, or whatever they called themselves."

"Is this nondescript building far from this spot?" inquired Walter.

"The park-paling is close by; but the house may be about half a mile."

"How is it that we have never seen this compound?"

"Because you walked quietly outside the barrier, while Clifford and I coolly leaped over—not very great feat, to step over three feet three."

"I should like to have a glance at so curious an edifice. Will you show me the way, Philip?"

"O, yes; just come through this break, Trevallian."

The young men were absent about an hour.

"Well," said Rayland, when they returned, "have you viewed the antique?"

"Yes; and some of the antiquities—a pair of the prettiest girls I have seen for a very long time."

"If you please to lead the way back again,"

said Walter, "I should like a peep as well as my neighbours,—two beauties in a forest are worth ten in a drawing-room, provided they are not antiquities."

"These rustic maidens cannot be more than seventeen, if so much."

"Then come along; we'll have some gossip with them."

"Softly, softly; these are not village damsels who would laugh half an hour for a new cap; they are above farmers' daughters; and I opine are residents at this ancient hall: has this stately 'squire any daughters, Lionel?"

"I really cannot say. He is so completely a recluse, that we never hear or think of him, but when some forest or parish business calls a meeting of the neighbouring gentlemen, and then he never attends the call."

"Is that allowed?"

"His steward answers for him, with full power to arrange and settle every concern relative to his master."

"He is then a decided misanthrope?"

"It seems very probable. I have heard my mother mention Mr. Penruddock and his wife; while she lived, they were on friendly terms at Beech Park, and my father often lamented the loss Mr. Penruddock was to their limited society: my mother regretted Mrs. Penruddock as a friend whom she had known in her early years; but after her death the gaiety of the Manor House was all over, and if my recollection is correct, the gentleman has never been visible since; probably he took advantage of her death, and made that an excuse for indulging a proud and reserved temper, for such my mother says he was considered by some, while others insisted that he was quite the reverse."

"Not visible! does he shut himself in that dull-looking mansion? why it is the very place for ghosts to inhabit!"

"Of course a house like that must be haunted," said Deverel; "but if the spirits are like those we saw in the park, I care not how many there are, nor how long I might haunt the dwelling

with them ;—but, hush, be still, they are coming this way."

The young men remained quiet, scarcely venturing to breathe, lest they should alarm the females, who were seen at a small distance, both reading in one book, and so deeply intent on their amusement—it could not be study in such a place—that they arrived nearly before the tent without lifting their eyes from the volume.

The high-bred foresters were equally attentive to the movements of the youthful pair, who were, as Philip described them, remarkably pretty ; one of them had pretensions to loveliness ; their simple attire gave no indication either of their rank or station : in these days the superior classes are less gaudily habited than many beneath them—these maidens might have been farmers' daughters, or the residents of a palace. Slowly and quietly they approached the camp where the young men were so intent on the beauty and novelty of the sight, that they ac-

tually were drawn up in a line, as if to face an enemy. Not for one moment did they consider the effect their sudden appearance might have on these young females. Not a word was spoken,—scarcely a breath was drawn; and possibly the maidens might have passed the encampment without being aware of its existence; but just as they were within a few paces of our foresters, one of the dogs gave a slight bark,—the maidens started, and to their surprise and apparent dismay, perceived a row of young men standing before them, while tents and all other appurtenances were behind. The book fell to the ground; a faint scream burst from one, while both stood as if petrified and doubting the evidence of their senses. It was a curious scene; the astonishment of the damsels was extreme; their looks seemed to say,

“What is all this? and where are we?”

while the expression of the gentle swains was admiration of the loveliness before them. De-

verel, being the quickest and most active of the party, was the first to break the spell, which he did by taking the book from the ground and presenting it to the prettiest girl, who was a step in advance of her companion—the other apparently drawing back.

Philip bowed as he tendered the book, which neither offered to take. Lionel then stepped forward, saying,

“Do not be alarmed, ladies; we are no robbers or persons you need fear; we are merely wandering knights, bound by the laws of chivalry to protect and aid all damsels in distress. Can we be of service to you in any way?”

The foremost maiden, while the rose spread over her cheeks, displacing the lily which fear had planted there, at last spoke,

“I fear we have lost our way, gentlemen; we never saw these tents before, and we imagined we were by Astol Park; I fear we must have wandered far.”

“No, indeed, lady; on the other side of that

brake are the palings surrounding the plantations. If you will allow me, I will show you the path?"

"I thank you, sir. I was startled for the moment and lost my recollection; but I know perfectly well where we are." Taking the book from Deverel, she made a slight acknowledgment to the party, then walked quickly with her companion to the brake, and was soon lost to the sight of the admiring young men.

"May I be shot to-morrow by the first gun," said Deverel, "if this is not the best part of our adventure."

"Rather tantalizing though," answered Walter. "If those pretty creatures had rested and partaken of our banquet, I would have hailed the chance that brought them here; this slight view only makes one wish for more, and there was no asking them to stop and chat or joke—they were above that, no farmers' daughters.—I'll send to town for a guitar, and serenade the beauties of the Manor House. Do recollect,

Lionel, if this most unneighbourly and aristocratic gentleman, with an interminable name, has any children male or female."

"I tell you, Rayland, I have not an idea on the subject; but these damsels must belong to Astol or its neighbourhood; and if you recollect, they said something which intimated as much: however, they have not quite taken away my appetite for supper. If they reside at the mansion, I wonder they were so much surprised; some of the servants must certainly have seen us: however, we may chance to meet again."

"I hope so," observed Rayland; "for, though it was annoying to be stared at, as we were at the last place, by all the clodpoles of the village, yet, to be considered not worth a second thought by those pretty maidens would be even more annoying."

CHAPTER III.

They mourn, but smile at length, and smiling mourn.
 The tree will wither long before its fall ;
 The hull drives on, though mast and sail be torn ;
 The roof-tree sinks, but moulders on the hall
 In mossy hoariness ; the ruined wall
 Stands when its wind-worn battlements are gone ;
 The bars survive the captive they intral ;
 The day drags through, though storms keep out the sun ;
 And thus the heart will break, yet brokenly live on.

ASTOL Manor House, the domain of Mr. Penruddock, was a low, ancient building, spreading over a vast extent of ground ; at what time or in whose reign it was erected would have puzzled an antiquary to determine : it was a heterogeneous mass, not to be defined or described,—low towers, turrets, wings, and carvings were thrown together without order or regularity. It had been a convent, if village legends spoke truth ; but there were no records or any documents farther back than the reign of Elizabeth, when it was inhabited by Gilbert

Penruddock, Esq., Justice of the Peace, &c.; and from him, it descended in the direct male line to its present possessor, William Penruddock, Esq., who, at the period in which our story commences, was in his forty-first year, a widower, with one child—the female who had so excited the admiration of the young foresters. The day on which Mr. Penruddock attained his twenty-fourth year united him to the only daughter of Sir George Stanley, who had just passed her eighteenth birth-day. Imagination can scarcely conceive two more enviable persons than the young lord of the manor and his lovely bride; they were of high consideration in the county, with large estates, youth, health, and accomplishments.

The tenants and domestics used to boast of the personal attractions of their master and his lady, and defy the kingdom to produce such another couple. It was no vain boast; they were pre-eminent for grace and beauty; nor were their dispositions inferior to their other qualities,—

kind-hearted, sensible, generous, and amiable, they had every prospect, the world said every certainty, of happiness. Astol Manor was the resort of the nobles and gentry of the county; no expense had been spared to render it as attractive and delightful a residence as one so young and lovely as its mistress might require. The mansion was completely repaired, a large part of it new furnished, while the first talents in the ornamental gardening department were engaged to render the pleasure-grounds as lovely as nature would permit; and they were almost a paradise, while the beautiful mistress of the domain appeared like a sylph in a fairy bower. Mirth and pleasure revelled in Astol Manor House; and the only sigh that ever came from the possessor of so much bliss was caused by the fear that such extreme happiness was more than mortal man ought to expect, or could hope to secure; but Mr. Penruddock was not a person to anticipate evil, and the pensive idea soon passed away, leaving him truly

grateful for the blessings by which he was surrounded.

How transient is the most promising earthly felicity ! Had one of the gay revellers who witnessed the first years of domestic bliss at the Manor House returned at the end of ten years—only ten years—they would have found Mr. Penruddock, on his thirty-fourth birth-day, a broken-hearted, solitary, and almost an aged man. The mansion was closed against all visitors ; the master never passed beyond the paling which surrounded the park. The dwellings more immediately in the vicinity were pulled down, and their inhabitants removed to a distant part of the estate ; while the roads were destroyed, and scarcely bridle-paths left for the inhabitants of a solitary farm-house, two miles distant from the park-lodge. Mr. Penruddock made ample amends to his tenants for any inconvenience they might experience by the destruction of the roads. In the interior, the change was even more striking, more direful ;

Mrs. Penruddock had been two years in her last silent home : a marble monument pointed out the spot where her remains were interred in the chapel within the walls of the Manor House, which, once the resort of mirth and happiness, now seemed the chosen abode of melancholy. The apartments inhabited by Mr. Penruddock were hung with black, and a mournful depressing gloom hung over the building, except in one part where the little Laura, the only memorial of the beautiful Florence, resided ; the suite of rooms appropriated to the use of the child were the most cheerful in the mansion, and Mr. Penruddock was anxious to prevent his daughter from imbibing any portion of the dejection which he appeared to court and cherish.

It was a matter of especial wonder among the friends and intimates of the family at Astol, that a man of Mr. Penruddock's strong sense and cultivated understanding should so completely sink under his bereavement ; as they were accustomed to observe, when com-

menting on their neighbour's conduct. "It was very sad to lose one so young, so lovely, and so amiable; the manner of her death too was very distressing—only ill a few hours; there was the misery of living in so lonely a situation,—you might die before assistance could possibly reach you, which was the case with Mrs. Penruddock, poor thing! They should long lament her, particularly as her husband was also lost to the world."

In Mr. Penruddock's thirty-sixth year, there was some little improvement in the interior of the mansion: the black draperies being dismissed, while the lively disposition of the youthful Laura gave a cheerful aspect to all around her; even Mr. Penruddock was less sad when his daughter soothed and caressed him.

The roads being destroyed, and trees planted where formerly carriages passed and repassed, all intercourse between Astol Manor and the world seemed ended. As the domestics dropped off, some by death and some few of the younger by marriage, they were never replaced; thus the

household gradually diminished, till at the period in which this tale commences, the establishment consisted of not more than one-third of the number employed at the death of Mrs. Penruddock. Mrs. Weston, or, as the servants and tenants were accustomed to call her, Madam Weston, was the housekeeper by name, but the mistress in reality of all relating to the internal arrangement of the Manor House; while Mr. Groves, the steward, was sovereign in the outer department,—Mr. Penruddock never at any time interfering nor questioning their proceedings.

Mrs. Weston was about twenty years her master's senior; she had been his nurse under the superintendence of Madam Everard, as she was accustomed to call Mr. Penruddock's mother; and having also been her master's nursery governess, she was not unqualified for the important station she held in the mansion. To her care was the infant Laura committed at the time of her mother's death, and the tie between them nearly resembled that known in

the ancient Scotch and Irish families, where the foster-mother is only less loved than the natural one. Mrs. Penruddock was herself the nurse to her child, but Weston had the sole charge of the infant, as she had formerly been entrusted with the father, and she truly felt a mother's love for both ; born and educated in the family, it was her boast that she had never slept one night from under the roof of Astol House, and when her mother died she was appointed housekeeper. Having no relations, all her affections were centred in her master and his daughter ; and next to Laura, Mr. Penruddock valued his old attendant. Madam Weston was regarded by the other servants with the same respect as if she had been really their mistress. Her comfortable and handsomely-furnished apartment was connected by a small ante-room with Miss Penruddock's *boudoir*, which was large and elegantly decorated, with an immense antique window opening into a spacious flower-garden : it was the pride of the old gardener to keep this place in order, "like it was in the late

lady's time," as he would say to Mrs. Weston; but all the servants were particularly cautioned never to mention their lady before Mr. Penruddock.

When Mr. Penruddock had recovered from the first stunning shock of his wife's death, he could not help feeling the forlorn situation of his little girl, then a child of five years, without any companions but sad and dejected servants. On questioning Mrs. Weston respecting a play-mate for Laura, it occurred to her recollection that a young farmer had not long before been killed by an accident, the fright of which had occasioned a fever to his wife, who soon followed him to the grave, leaving an only daughter, a child about a year older than Miss Penruddock: it really was an act of charity to rescue the poor little girl from the deplorable situation in which she was left; and to the satisfaction of all parties, she was established as an inmate of the Manor House.

Lucy Moreton's lively, affectionate, and grate-

ful disposition added much to the comfort of the limited circle at Astol, where she was loved and regarded as one of the family; having no friend nor relative, all her world was, like Laura Penruddock's, within the boundary of the Astol domain. They were both too young to remember the loss of their parents more than as a dream; from that time their lives had been one unvarying scene of indulgence and happiness. Mr. Penruddock was so anxiously careful not to sadden and depress their minds with his melancholy, that he would only allow his daughter to be with him a portion of the day, which he said was more than sufficient for such a young and sensitive heart to encounter.

From the time that Lucy Moreton entered the Penruddock family she had scarcely ever been so far as the spot where our forest heroes were stationed, and Laura was equally secluded. Mr. Penruddock's carriages were useless, as the roads were destroyed; nor would he allow a horse to be kept at the Manor House, not even

for domestic purposes, depending entirely on the farm before-mentioned for whatever his household might require beyond what the manor afforded. This farm, the Grange, was the residence of Mr. Barwell, a wealthy and respectable tenant on the Astol estate; and from the Grange a rough lane conducted to the highways leading to the inhabited parts of the county; but so completely had Mr. Penruddock destroyed all approach to the Manor House, that, from the time of Mrs Penruddock's funeral, no stranger had ever been inside the park paling till Philip Deverel and the Baronet leaped the wall. No inducement short of avoiding the penalty of being exposed to the curiosity of the rambling villagers could have prompted the idea of penetrating so wild a part as the neighbourhood of Astol, which our fancy foresters had the greatest difficulty in reaching. Nothing less than a broad-wheel waggon could have escaped destruction over the rough ground, encumbered with roots, and overgrown with brambles and

briers, which Mr. Penruddock had allowed to luxuriate round his domain. Even to a sportsman or a lover of the picturesque there was no temptation in the wild solitudes of Astol; there were no preserves; the tenants on the Astol manor had full permission to take what game they could find; and they were not backward in accepting the good provided by Providence and given by the landlord to their free and full use. The consequence was, as Mr. Penruddock anticipated; there was little or no game to tempt the Hawthorns of the county into this remote and wild part of the forest; and till the day when our London party saw the young daughter of Mr. Penruddock and her companion, there had never been a stranger above the rank of a labourer within five or ten miles of Astol. Numbers of Mr. Penruddock's friends had called in the first months of his widowed state; but he had so completely and so decidedly repulsed every attempt, alleging his determination of never again mixing in the world, that

after a few fruitless endeavours, his old friends and acquaintance first wondered, then blamed; when, after some few months, new events occurred, and Mr. Penruddock was forgotten, or only named at rare intervals, when some reminiscence would conjure up the days long past by; then a few sighs would be given by those who knew Astol in its best times—some to the memory of its lovely mistress, and some to the gaieties for which Astol was unrivalled.

Having passed all her life in retirement, and nearly twelve years in this perfect seclusion, it was not surprising that Laura Penruddock should be alarmed and astonished at the sight of the new inhabitants of a spot, where she had never witnessed any other living being than her father's domestics and the native birds and animals of the forest. The sedate middle-aged servants, with Farmer Barwell and his son Reuben, and a few labourers belonging to the farm, were the only persons of whom Laura had very distinct recollection. Occasionally some

fainter ideas would recur of other beings, male and female, but it was more the vague remembrance of a dream than positive recollection.

If Mr. Penruddock wished to keep his daughter totally secluded and ignorant of the world, he could not have chosen a better person than Mrs. Weston to have the charge of his household. A spinster in her sixtieth year, born, bred, and absolutely a part of the family, she had no wish beyond the Manor House, and no further idea of the world than what she had witnessed in her younger days within the boundaries of Astol. Mr. Penruddock was more to her than a monarch on his throne ; she not only loved him as a son, but she revered him as her master, and in her opinion he was the first and best of created beings. Never did she question any order or desire of his ; they were commands literally, and they were to be implicitly obeyed : now she had only to conjecture what his wishes might be. During the first period of grief his present routine was arranged and established ;

tion appeared to her young companions to increase in cheerfulness with her years, and Lucy would often question her on the change, recalling the time when Madam Weston was very sorrowful, and when they often surprised her in tears; now this rarely, indeed never occurred, and once when they mentioned it to her, she said, "Oh, my dears, it is impossible to live with such merry little things as you are without catching mirth; I must take care of myself, or I shall be a very child with you." In fact, as Weston said, it was impossible to live with two such happy creatures and not imbibe some portion of their hilarity. Whether the influence would have extended to the melancholy Lord of the manor is uncertain; there was no opportunity of ascertaining if the deep settled grief of the husband would yield to the affection of the father. A certain portion of the day was devoted by Mr. Penruddock to the education of his daughter, for which he was well qualified. He dined, or rather he sat at table, with Laura

and Lucy, and one half-hour he walked with Laura in her flower-garden. The rest of his time was passed in the library, where no one but Laura was admitted, and in one part of the grounds, a solitary and dismal-looking spot, called the Beech Grove; this portion of the park was forbidden to all the inhabitants of the Manor House, even to the little Laura, who had once during her childhood cried long "to go with papa in his wood."

Mr. Penruddock assured her there was nothing pretty in his wood, as she termed it; but Laura was not to be pacified till she received a promise to go the next day. When the little girl was alone with Weston and Lucy, she looked earnestly on her nurse and inquired what was the matter with her? "Did she wish to go with them to the Beech Grove?"

"No, my dear," replied Weston, "I never wish for anything that will make your papa unhappy."

"What will make him unhappy, dear Weston?"

"Your wish to be his companion will make him very unhappy."

"I do not understand, nurse!"

"Your papa does not like you to go with him when he walks in the Beech Grove."

"And why not?"

"Your papa does not tell me his reason, Miss Laura, but I know you will make him very sorry if you go with him, and I did not think you would wish to make him sorry."

Laura made no answer, nor did she speak again on the subject during the rest of the day. On the morrow, when Mr. Penruddock prepared for his walk he asked for his daughter, and taking her hand, he led the way to the dark and gloomy avenue leading through the Grove. The little girl looked repeatedly in his face, but to her comprehension there was no appearance of grief. There was no difference in her father, and Laura soon recovered her usual gay spirits; these, however, were quickly checked. Mr. Penruddock requested she would be silent. "This is not a pleasure, my dear Laura," said

he, "and you will oblige me by being quiet." The tone of Mr. Penruddock's voice was different to his usual sad but composed speech, and Laura looked earnestly at him; at length she said, "Are you not happy, papa?" A convulsive movement—it was scarcely a start—was his only answer. Laura continued, "Tell me, dear papa, shall I make you sorry, very sorry, if I walk with you? Weston said I should." Young as Laura was, she could distinguish a change in her father's countenance; but no reply was given to the anxious and affectionate child, who now gave full credit to the report of her nurse; and she believed, though she wondered why, that she had made her father sorry, very sorry! Withdrawing her hand from Mr. Penruddock, she said, "Good bye, dear papa, I will not make you sorry; I will go back to Weston, and not walk with you in that dark, gloomy garden. Don't stay there long; it is not pleasant as my garden."

that time Laura was satisfied, and

never again expressed a wish to walk in the Beech Grove, and her report was sufficient to satisfy Lucy also, as Laura said the trees were so thick, and closed together at top, so that it looked like night ; it was a frightful, ugly place, and she could not think why papa liked to walk there.

CHAPTER IV.

Boon nature scattered, free and wild,
 Each plant or flower, the mountain's child.
 Here eglantine embalm'd the air;
 Hawthorn and hazel mingled there.
 The primrose pale, and violet flower,
 Found in each cliff a narrow bower.

FROM that time till the commencement of our tale, neither Laura nor Lucy had ever expressed the slightest desire of visiting the Beech Wood. No one ever pursued the path leading to the right from the Manor House; and in the course of time they almost forgot the prohibition, while from habit the wishes of Mr. Penruddock and the directions of Mrs. Weston were obeyed. They had a wide extent of park to range at will, without interfering with the forbidden grove of beeches, which in truth was but a dull and rather dismal part of the domain. Perhaps the inhabitant of a more populous country might have called

the whole manor dreary and forlorn, for its master, instead of opening the view into the forest glades, had planted a belt of trees and shrubs among the underwood that surrounded the park. A wandering sportsman might have travelled round the estate without being aware of his vicinity to a mansion. The park paling was only allowed to remain in places where the underwood and brambles had not formed a sufficient fence to secure the deer ; in a very short space of time Farmer Barwell said there would be a perfectly secure wall of thickly matted furze and bushes. The lodge belonging to the manor was concealed, and the park boundary carried a considerable distance beyond the low ancient building, where a labourer resided, whose wife acted—not as portress, but guard—not to admit, but prevent all entrance save to those who were of the household, or connected with the Grange ; and never since the first year after Mrs. Penruddock's death had she once had occasion to exercise her office, or refuse admittance ; so

effectually had the broken roads, now no longer roads, prevented any person from approaching the lawns of Astol.

In a seclusion so extraordinary and so complete did Laura Penruddock reside till her seventeenth year, and, as many would think, in a miserable solitude; but Laura had no thought of that kind; she was happy herself, and appeared to give happiness to those around. Never having known any other life, she had no wish—no desire for change; nor till the unexpected meeting with Walter Rayland and his companions had she reflected on the world, or the beings it might contain; and now when she had so strangely encountered others, the only idea that occurred to her was, not to leave the inclosed flower-garden till these strange visitors had departed.

When first the inhabitants of Astol Manor were separated from the world, and their daily routine established, Laura and Lucy were accustomed to receive instruction from Mrs. Weston

in those few female accomplishments that the good lady had power to teach; she was perfectly satisfied with her own tuition, and proud of her pupils, exhibiting the beautiful needlework Miss Penruddock had at various times commenced and finished for her instructress's especial use. Laura had been long removed from under Mrs. Weston's care, but she still retained her love and respect for the only mother she remembered, and never omitted to pass some hours daily with Mrs. Weston in her own apartment, when Laura and Lucy would employ themselves with some articles of needlework, purposely to please Mrs. Weston, who, with pride and pleasure, gave the instruction Laura persisted in requiring as necessary to the accomplishment of her labour; and at these hours it was natural that the discourse should turn on the 'gentle foresters:' various were the conjectures formed by the young maidens of Astol respecting the strange sight they had witnessed in the forest. No definite form remained on

their memory; it was a confused but gay picture, which surprise and fear prevented them from contemplating. Though nearly as isolated as Miranda in her father's enchanted and enchanting island, yet they were not so unacquainted with the human race; they were at no loss respecting the identity of the persons they encountered, nor had they much doubt respecting the rank of the interlopers on their domain—they must be of "gentle birth and breeding;" their graceful courtesy was unlike any of the inhabitants of Astol, except Mr. Penruddock and Reuben Barwell. They were altogether bewildered respecting the costume of these strangers; and at length Laura and Lucy decided they must be soldiers; not that the pictures or prints in the Manor House gave any representation of warriors such as appeared before them on that day; they had never heard of archery meetings, and they were not likely to conjecture the truth, that they were fancy-dress foresters in full-trimmed suits. The idea of so

wild a freak as the reality was scarcely possible to occur to their imagination.

"Really, Madam Weston," said Lucy one day when they were commenting on the subject, "I could scarcely believe my eyes when Laura started, and I, looking to find the reason, perceived I cannot tell how many men, but very different from those we are accustomed to see—not at all like Reuben Barwell in outward appearance, and certainly not like his father the farmer. They were dressed very differently from Mr. Penruddock, but the way in which they spoke and presented the book resembled him."

"Why, Lucy," returned Laura, "I thought you had not observed them. You seem to have taken an accurate survey."

"Lucy's description," observed Mrs. Weston, "gives me the idea of their being gentlemen; their manner was dignified, not rustic like Reuben's father or Mr. Groves."

"Do you call Mr. Barwell's manner rustic, Laura?"

"Compared to my father's, perhaps; but what other idea does Lucy's account give?" asked Laura.

"That they are young gentlemen on a shooting excursion, as Reuben supposed. Their dress I cannot understand: no young lord or squire wore the garb described so often by Lucy."

"Do you remember many young gentlemen visiting at Astol?"

"To be sure I do, my dear. There was the Earl of Corfe, and Baron Westmond—they were gay and gallant nobles; then there was Squire Delaval—he was a merry gentleman; and Sir Martin Pelham,—I cannot tell you how many I have seen dancing in the ball-room."

"With 'store of ladies,' I presume?"

"Of course, Miss Laura; they would scarcely dance without. I don't know what the present race of young men may be, but in those days they were something to brag of."

"I wish those days had continued; do not you, Laura?" asked Lucy.

"I scarcely know; but I should like to know

why they ended.— Do not look grave, dear Weston ; I know you endeavour to avoid speaking or thinking on this subject ; but it does appear strange : I have often read of a similar misfortune to my father's."

"What do you mean, Miss Penruddock ? what misfortune ?" asked Weston, in a hurried voice.

"The loss of my mother. Was not that the reason why my father forsook the world ?"

"It was sufficient to make any man forsake the world."

"Yet I have read of many who loved sincerely, who still mixed with society, and in time forgot their sorrow."

"They were not such women as my lady ;— but do not speak of it, Laura ; it always makes me sad."

"And it always makes me wonder. Surely if this dreadful loss causes so great an impression on you, how ought it to affect me ? I have some slight recollection of my mother ; and at times I fancy myself a brute, a stone, to be gay

and happy, while you, dear Weston, cannot bear even to think of her without suffering !—There do not grieve. Cheer up, and I will fetch the paper I told you I had written, containing ‘The earliest recollections and ideas of Laura Penruddock, the heiress of Astol, and the spoiled child of her father and nurse.’ ”

“That you never were, because no one could spoil you.”

“You did your part towards it, however; but I will fetch my manuscript. Now, good nurse,” said Laura, when she returned, “now you shall have the chronicles of Astol.”

“Bless your heart ! what made you think of writing anything of the kind ? Why there have been no changes or alterations to speak about since you were an infant almost.”

“True ; but yet I have scribbled what I thought worthy of observation when I was an infant ; the ideas suggested by the commencement partake more of pain than pleasure ; but should they induce you to explain the cause of

these mournful sensations, my intention will be answered ;—so listen to the chronicles of Laura the wild girl of Astol :—

“ My earliest recollection is of a crowd. Gay scenes swim before my imagination ; as in a dream I can trace the outline of some brilliant picture ; it may be illusion ; but a vision of grace and loveliness floats on my memory——”

“ Ah ! that was your mother ! She was in truth, as I have heard the gentles say, more than mortal.”

“ Then my reminiscences are correct. This vision of beauty would caress and play with me ; and there was another, but not so lovely, or I did not love her so well. I can remember some angry words and cross looks, when I would fly to the beauty, who always soothed and comforted me when the other was cross. There were many persons, and my kind friend, I cannot recollect if she was my mother, but no doubt she was, took me into a splendid hall,—but it was larger and gayer than any at Astol.”

"It must have been here though, for you never left my care. When my lady went to London, it was only for a very short time every spring; she would say, 'Take care of my darling, Weston; she will be safer and happier here than in a crowded city and close streets.'

"There was one gentleman, I recollect, who used to wander about the park. You must remember, Weston, for I was always with you. He was not like papa—and yet he was; but he would stop you, and frighten me. Why should this circumstance remain more clear to my memory than even my mother's love,—but so it is; I still see that dark, ill-looking man."

"Oh, no, Miss Laura: he was not ill-looking. Sir Edward——"

Mrs. Weston suddenly stopped.

"Sir Edward who?—why do you not finish his name?"

"I am sure I cannot tell what made me mention that name: it is only your imagination which has created this scene."

"But you have given my imagination 'a local habitation and a name,' as my favourite poet says. So pray continue, dear Weston."

"Indeed, Miss Laura, I can say nothing or know nothing of a child's dream."

"This beautiful form that used to hover over and around me was cheerful and gay,—always singing and dancing with me, and telling me some merry tale; but there was a change—instead of laughing she would cry; and I remember once she sobbed as if her heart would break, and you, Weston, yes, you were there—do not deny it—I am sure you were the person who knelt down and kissed the hand of my beautiful mother, as she reposed on a couch; and it was in my fairy room, with the large window opening to the garden, and you pressed me to your heart and cried; and then,—I must continue, Weston, though we are all crying as you did then, when my mother caught me in her arms, and wept and sobbed, as I hope never to hear any one weep again."

all this while I cannot say, for I have no recollection of him at any time ; but one day—I wonder why painful scenes dwell so strongly on the memory !—there was a dreadful bustle, —frightful shrieks were, and are even now, ringing in my ears ; they came from every part of the house, and I could neither find you nor my lovely friend. Well do I recollect the screams I uttered, I suppose, for mamma ; but no one attended to me, and louder screams rang through the house. It was a fearful dream ; and then I remember all was black, and I was put in black, and every thing and every body wore the same dismal colour. I understand it now,—we were in mourning ; and then there was a great blank. It seems very strange that early impressions should remain clearer and more vivid in my imagination than those of a later date. When I next recall my ideas, we were playful girls, Lucy and I, attending you every day with our work and books ; and when I had finished with my father, I came to you and Lucy.

lost her ;—but we have had enough of melancholy for to-day. You will scarcely be ready for the dinner-bell, if you do not go to your room, Miss Laura."

"You are right, Weston ; more time has passed than I supposed ; and I must not make papa wait."

The dinner passed, as their dinners usually did, in calm, quiet conversation. Mr. Penruddock would occasionally attempt a lighter strain—but it never succeeded ; the effort was vain ; and even to Laura appeared unnatural : while the effect of these momentary endeavours on her father was to render his dejection and melancholy still deeper. Much as Laura deplored his visible sorrow, yet she never wished to witness his unsuccessful struggle for cheerfulness ; it was even more painful than his habitual grief.

Laura found the most effectual method of drawing her father from his settled sadness was to question him respecting some event of history, or any subject which occurred in her morning's

study. Mr. Penruddock took a deep interest in his daughter's education. To form her mind appeared the sole occupation of his life. With the exception of his lonely and daily walk, and his evening retirement, Laura's improvement was the only idea that seemed ever to give him the slightest interest; and to procure her every pleasure and comfort, consistent with the solitude in which she was secluded, was the only wish he ever expressed. The choicest flowers were raised in her garden; music and paintings were procured by Farmer Barwell, without reference to expense or trouble; but no new publications or literary productions were ever included. Mr. Penruddock had no intention of giving the inhabitants of his dwelling any idea of what was passing in that world from which they were so effectually secluded. Had they been residents in the South Sea Islands, they could not, as far as the superiors in the mansion were concerned, be more completely separated from all but those immediately connected with them and in their service.

Laura would at intervals express a desire of remaining longer with her father in the evening; but her affectionate anxiety to soothe and amuse was, after the stated hour, always kindly, gratefully, but firmly declined.

"No, my dear Laura," said Mr. Penruddock to her one evening; "we are creatures of habit, and I have so many years been accustomed to pass certain hours in privacy, that I feel almost compelled by custom, even if I had no other motive."

"But after a few successful endeavours, dear papa, you would acquire a contrary habit; and then I should have your company in my evening ramble: and look how beautifully the moon is rising, with the beams dancing on the water; I never think that little streamlet half so pretty as when the rays of the moon play on the rippling surface; and when we ascend the higher grounds in the park, and catch the gleams of light sparkling on the distant sea——oh! I wish, my dear father, you would come and enjoy the scene with me."

"My presence would scarcely increase your enjoyment——"

"Oh, yes!" said Laura, interrupting him; "you know not how happy it would make me."

"I would not sadden your innocent pleasures; the world would say you had already too few."

"The world!" It was the first time Laura had ever remembered hearing her father even allude to there being others besides themselves under the wide canopy of heaven; and she looked at him with unfeigned astonishment. He either was not aware of the allusion, or it was unintentional, and he would not give importance to the word by repeating it. He took no notice of Laura's exclamation, and continued.

"Cherish, my daughter, the taste you have for the wild, simple enjoyments that are placed before you; and be thankful that your pure and gentle disposition will give zest to trifles; this is a real blessing,—may it ever continue!"

"When you feel so truly the value of these delights, why will you not share them with me?"

"Because," said Mr. Penruddock, while a pang of agony appeared to pass over his features, "those pleasures are only to be enjoyed by innocence and purity like thine, Laura."

"I have read, papa, that every year takes away some portion of the purity of childhood; but I never read of any person lamenting so deeply those errors that must unavoidably occur. It is the lot of man; but," added she, smiling, "methinks I am in a fair way of losing some credit for amiability when I take on me to censure my father: so, for fear I should incur greater blame, do, dear papa, come with your own Laura!"

Mr. Penruddock shook his head mournfully.

"I shall begin to suspect you are not the very, very wise man I thought you."

"And why, dearest?"

"Because you nourish and cherish what wise men and good men, like yourself, usually dismiss with all possible expedition."

"Do your books tell you so, Laura?"

state. I hope I shall never experience a sensation that will make me sad like my poor father." Laura wondered if the frequent mention made by Lucy of Reuben Barwell had any reference to the obnoxious sentiment. "It must be a torment, if books were to be trusted.—How often it had led to misery, despair, and disgrace ; and Shakspeare, that beautiful poet, who knew so much of the world, men, and manners, he said the 'stream never ran smooth ;'—never! Who then would receive or nourish a passion fraught with certain sorrow ?" Such were Laura's thoughts, as she reclined at the casement in a large easy chair, and blessed her fate that she ran small chance of being a victim to so delusive a passion as love. "She would pass through life calmly and serenely, without encountering those evils, which her books told her were inseparable from true affection. It was sad that such should be the case ; but love should never be her torment ; she would not know a deeper love than the affection she bore her father ; she would main-

tain with care the sentiments she felt for those around her—Lucy, Weston, the domestics whom she had known from childhood,—they would all be dear; but she would have no nearer love. The world, too, her father had that evening mentioned—the world—to her a word without meaning: how could a girl who had never seen ten houses, nor been out of a forest, have any idea of the world? Laura supposed it meant a concourse of men and women gaily dressed, as she had some faint remembrance of having seen in her infancy; but the reminiscence was not pleasing; a feeling of dread, almost amounting to horror, would pervade her mind when memory recalled the events of what only floated on her mind like a distressing dream, from which the sleeper struggles to escape with unavailing efforts.

There were many trifling events which perhaps contributed to keep alive this painful feeling, and had Laura been of a sombre disposition, they might have saddened her temper, and have given

a gloomy and melancholy tinge to her character ; fortunately, Laura Penruddock was a personification of cheerfulness, and the remembrance of her early years now only occurred at rare intervals, when it was deeply felt, and soon forgotten. Her mind was disposed to view all around her as so many motives for happiness ; feeling so herself, she imparted the same sensation to her immediate companions. Lucy was even of a gayer disposition, and Mrs. Weston recovered some portion of the gaiety for which in her youth she had been a favourite in the neighbourhood of Astol. Had it not been for this prevailing sentiment among the principal females at the Manor House, their days would probably have passed in dread and melancholy. Like most other ancient buildings, this had its full proportion of marvels, mysteries, and legends of the olden time :—many were the tales related by the domestics respecting the various chambers in the unoccupied part of the mansion ; and the maidens of Astol more readily gave credit to

some of the reports—some not quite so wild as the rest—as they had themselves heard, or fancied they heard, sounds of mysterious import; and an event occurred at this time which tended to keep alive the superstitious feeling, at which they laughed in the sunshine, and half believed in the shade of night.

The extreme heat of the weather had affected the health of Mrs. Weston, who was so unwell that she required attendance in the night. Margaret pressed the necessity of a doctor; but to this Mrs. Weston strongly objected. How was a doctor to get there? and it would give Mr. Penruddock so much sorrow if strangers were on any pretence to be admitted.

"Oh no, Margaret," said Mrs. Weston, in reply to her arguments; "you are doctor enough for me. There is thunder in the air. I dare say we shall have a good storm, and then I shall be better. You know such hot weather never did agree with me."

Mrs. Weston was right in her conjecture

respecting her amendment ; but, fortunately for the inhabitants of the forest, her prediction respecting the "good storm" was not verified. During her illness the female domestics sat with her in the night ; and one evening when the day had been oppressively hot, and they were all tired, Laura and Lucy proposed to remain in the sick-room the early part of the night, that the servants might have some rest before they took their station with the invalid. Margaret and her companions slept soundly, and Laura and Lucy were unwilling to disturb them ; but Mrs. Weston insisted that they should not remain with her all night. "Indeed she was quite well enough," she said, "to dispense with nursing altogether ; but if they would not leave her alone, why then they must call Margaret, for she would not have them made ill for all the old women in the world."

Weston was positive, and they were compelled to submit. They called Margaret, and returned to Mrs. Weston's room pale and ter-

rified; she had much difficulty in comprehending the account they gave of footsteps in some of the unoccupied rooms; and Lucy persisted that she heard sighs and groans and various mournful sounds. Weston at first turned pale, as she very naturally might, when she witnessed the terror of her young nurses; she might well suppose, as she said, that they had more cause for alarm than a slight noise, which they would not have noticed in the daylight. Laura admitted the truth of the remark; "but yet it was not fancy."

"My dear children," said Mrs. Weston, "this comes of letting you sit up so late; you have tired yourselves and are ready to tremble at anything."

"But you tremble too, nurse."

"Because I am weak and ill: go to bed, my dears; you will laugh at this to-morrow." Margaret entered the room, and Mrs. Weston hurried the young ladies away, wishing them "good night," saying she felt "weary, and should sleep if they were gone."

"Really, Lucy," said Laura, when they were safe within their own apartment, "I begin to think we frightened ourselves without any cause."

"No cause! when we heard the footsteps as plainly as I now hear you."

"It certainly did appear so; but who could be wandering at this late hour? and in old houses like this there are always strange and unaccountable sounds,—if you recollect, Lucy, several of our books tell us so; and besides, who could it be? There are not any of the men servants likely to be so sentimental as to range the apartments at night."

The idea of thieves, or any person out of their family being in the house, never occurred either to Laura or Lucy: with one, it might be her father; with the other, the noise must be supernatural. Lucy was not naturally either weak or superstitious; but the dwelling-house of Astol Manor was exactly calculated to create and nourish the tales of ghosts and supernatural

appearances, which are not totally disbelieved in many of our remote villages; and Mr. Penruddock's library was of the olden time, possessing a large assortment of the wild and wonderful. It never occurred to either of the maidens to alarm the family, as Lucy very justly said, "they could do nothing against shadows."

"It had rather a heavy footstep for a shadow, Lucy," said Laura, forgetting her previous remark.

"Pray don't jest about it, Laura; but let us go to bed."

"With all my heart, for I am very tired and sleepy. To-morrow I hope Weston will be better."

CHAPTER VI.

Whence is 't, Mæcenæ, that so few approve
The state they 're placed in, and incline to rove ?
Whether against their will by fate imposed,
Or by consent and prudent choice espoused ?

" SOMETHING very wonderful has occurred, Laura," said Lucy the next morning when her young friend opened her eyes at a later hour than usual. Laura was alarmed, and hastily inquired the meaning of Lucy's words, adding,

" Mrs. Weston is not worse, I hope ? "

" She is much better."

" Then what can have happened—my doves flown away ?

" Oh, no ; but you will never guess, so I must tell ; there is a stranger at Astol."

" You spoke truly, Lucy, when you said I should never guess ; but surely you are mistaken ? "

" Indeed I am not ; I saw him this morning

"Oh, yes, I almost forgot him; but he will not do for our friend."

"Well, say then who or what is this stranger? for I have my share of curiosity as well as yourself, Lucy."

"Do not let your curiosity carry you too far; for this man is only a labourer to assist old Mills, who, since he had that fall in the park, has been rather lame."

Laura interrupted Lucy by laughing so long that Lucy was half angry.

"And all this preparation is for a gardener's labourer!" said Laura, when she had ceased laughing. "Why, Lucy, I pictured Sir Charles Grandison at least, with his six fine fat horses and flowing tails!—I have often wished to see so grand a personage; though we should be puzzled to make the comparison, which the writer always does, to the advantage of his hero: so little do we know of the world, that the new gardener might, if he pleased, pass with us for the dignified Baronet."

"Oh, no ; even to such novices as we are, a man in a gaberdine of coarse cloth could scarcely be taken for a gentleman."

"Has your wonder only made his appearance this morning ? "

"He has been here three days ; but no person mentioned the addition to the family—and really no one seems pleased : for my own part, though he is only, as they say, a common hard-working man, yet I am not sorry,—perhaps it may be the commencement of other introductions."

"Why do you wish for others ? we are very comfortable, Lucy."

"Oh yes, very ; but I should sometimes like a little variety."

"You would like to see what is called the world ? "

Lucy hesitated—sighed—and at last confessed it would not displease her, if she might be permitted to visit the town where her parents had resided, and of which she retained some slight remembrance.

"Well then, Lucy, I will speak to my father, and if possible procure you liberty to seek the friends of your childhood."

"'Twere useless to attempt that; I have no recollection of any, even by name."

"Then I cannot understand the motive for your present wish."

"Only curiosity."

"Is that all, Lucy?"

"All! have you no curiosity to see and hear those persons of whom we read?"

"I doubt if we should see them, Lucy," said Laura, laughing; "and what can we require more than we have here?"

"Very true; but do you remember, dear Laura, what we read in the play the other day, where Juliana says,

'What wants the bird that from his wiry prison
Sings to the passing travellers of air
A wistful note?'"

"Your liberty!" said Laura, still laughing.
"I see it now, without continuing those pretty

lines. I will enfranchise thee, my fluttering captive; but say, wilt thou return?"

"Oh, doubt me not, Miss Penruddock."

"Well then, I will not doubt you, and when I see my father, I will plead your cause."

Laura performed her promise so soon as Mr. Penruddock gave her the opportunity; taking advantage of a pause, she preferred her request, never anticipating a refusal. Her father gazed earnestly for a moment, as if not comprehending the nature of her wish. On a repetition, his countenance changed,—the usual calm sadness of his features assumed a stern, severe expression, which Laura had never at any time before observed.

"And this is Lucy Moreton's wish?"

"It is, my dear papa; but do not look so grave—it is only a wish."

"In which perhaps you participate?"

"No, indeed. I have no desire—I never had—nor ever will have any wish but yours."

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed Mr. Pen-

ruddock, and heaving a deep sigh, he appeared as if relieved from a heavy weight of anxiety.

"Lucy will be very sorry when she hears her request gave you pain, my dear father," said Laura, at the same time tenderly caressing Mr. Penruddock; "but forget it, and I promise you shall hear no more of her foolish fancy."

"Take one turn round your garden, my sweet Laura, and then come to me again."

Laura complied with her father's desire. When she again entered the apartment, she found him calm and composed; he was seated at a table, with some papers before him. When he saw his daughter, he rang and directed the servant to send Miss Moreton. Lucy obeyed the summons—half hope, half fear, for she always felt some awe mixed with affection for her benefactor.

"Sit down, Miss Moreton," said Mr. Penruddock. Lucy obeyed.

"Laura informs me you have some desire to leave Astol."

Lucy blushed, stammered, and hesitated. Mr. Penruddock waited very calmly, till she at last found words to acknowledge she had an inclination to visit the scene of her childhood. She had no relations to be sure; but probably she might meet some friend of her parents who for their sake would show civility to her. When Lucy finished speaking, Mr. Penruddock took a paper from the table, saying,

"This will secure you some attention, and procure you the comforts of life; this is an order on the bank at Benturn to pay you two hundred pounds yearly——"

Lucy started, and Laura gazed earnestly at her father, who continued,

"This sum shall be secured to you for life; should you have occasion for the principal, in the event of your marriage, by making application to Mr. Groves, arrangements shall be made accordingly as you may deem requisite."

Lucy had heard and seen so little of money matters, that she really did not understand Mr.

Penruddock, who waited a few moments for her to express her wishes, if she had any, on the subject ; finding she remained silent, he made a slight movement, which was usual with him when he wished to be alone. Lucy, half-pleased and half-bewildered, as she rose from her chair attempted to speak her gratitude. Mr. Penruddock interrupted her, saying, " You are under no obligation to me, Lucy ; on the contrary, I am indebted to you for the comfort you have been to my dear Laura. You have my sincere wishes for your happiness."

Lucy was retiring, when again she hesitated.

" Have you any further request, Lucy ? "

" Only, Sir—when would you wish me to return ? "

Mr. Penruddock looked at her for a moment, then in a calm, low, but resolute voice, he answered, " Never ! "

The effect of that single word was magical. Lucy sunk in the chair from which she had just risen, while Laura started from hers, and ex-

claimed hastily "Never! oh no, papa,—you cannot mean that?"

"When Miss Moreton leaves Astol Manor, she leaves it for ever!"

Lucy almost screamed with dismay.

"What will become of me, Mr. Penruddock? I have no friend but you, and Laura, and Mrs. Weston—no one in the wide world will care for me! Who will protect me?"

"This paper, Lucy, will enable you to protect yourself; if this be not sufficient, more shall be provided."

Lucy was insensible to this consolation: she wished to visit the place she had some recollections of as being very gay and bustling—a change for a few weeks or so; but to leave Astol for ever—never return!—there was misery in the sound—leave the sweet, kind, affectionate girl who had been a sister to her, and Mrs. Weston who had been a mother to both; Mr. Penruddock too, though Lucy stood in awe of him, still she loved and respected her benefactor,—to leave

them all, she could not bear it. In an instant the whole scene was changed,—the idea of the town was hateful ; the gaiety she faintly remembered detestable ; the world was a wilderness, and happiness only to be found in her present isolated dwelling. As these thoughts rushed over her mind, a frightful picture of her future lonely prospect spread full before her, and leaning her head upon the table she wept bitterly.

“ Lucy, my dear Lucy, do not weep so ; papa will let you return if I entreat ! ”

“ Do not deceive yourself and Lucy,” said Mr. Penruddock, in rather a severe manner. “ I will retire, Laura ; comfort Lucy as much as you please, but do not mislead her,—she will never return while I am master at Astol.”

Mr. Penruddock was leaving the room, when Lucy started, and threw herself at his feet, entreating for mercy and forgiveness.

“ You have not offended me, Lucy ; but rise, I command you,” said he ;—Lucy quickly obeyed, while he continued,—“ I do not under-

stand you, Lucy; first you petition to go, now you appear in despair at having your desire gratified."

"I understand Lucy, dear papa; she only wished to leave for a short time—a very short time; am I not right, Lucy?"

"That was what I did mean; but I do not wish it now. I hate myself for having thought of such folly—oh! if I might——" What Lucy might desire could not be understood from her sobbing utterance. Mr. Penruddock waited a short space, when, finding she could not speak so as to be comprehended, he said,

"I will leave you with Laura, and you may perhaps be able to tell her what will give you comfort and happiness."

"I shall never know comfort nor happiness when I leave Astol," replied Lucy, in a low mournful voice.

"Then *why* leave it?"

Again Lucy started. "Why! why leave it?"

Did you not say I must go, and never return, Sir ? ”

“ Nay, Lucy, it was your wish to go.”

“ And will you let me stay ? ”

“ Certainly, if you can be happy here, and bear the confinement and solitude. Laura will grieve for her companion, and I shall mourn for her ; therefore, if you can stay with comfort to yourself, you will add to mine.”

“ Oh, dear Sir ! Heaven bless——”

Poor Lucy could say no more ; but, throwing her arms round Laura’s neck, again she sobbed, but not now with bitterness : her joy caused as many tears as her sorrow had previously done ; and Laura wept for company, while Mr. Penruddock left them to recover composure at leisure.

CHAPTER VII.

Like as a hind forth singled from the herd,
 That hath escaped from a ravenous beast,
 Yet flies away, of her own feet affeard,
 And every leaf, that shaketh with the least
 Murmur of wind, her terror hath increast:
 Each shade she saw, and each noise she did hear,
 Did seem to be the same, which she escapt whylere.

WHEN Laura went at her usual hour to sit with Mrs. Weston, she found Lucy had been relating the event of the morning to her sympathizing friend, whose eyes were only less red than Lucy's.

"My dear Miss Laura, I have been breaking my heart with poor dear silly Lucy. Another time when you have any of these whims and fancies, tell me first, and I shall be able to give you advice on the subject: not for worlds would I have allowed you to mention or hint at such a wish, unless you really did intend leaving us for ever."

Again Lucy's tears flowed.

"Do, poor thing, go and walk in the garden; you will then be better, and I will try to get a little sleep—in truth, you have made my eyes ache. My sweetest child will go with you; and never dream of rambling again."

The youthful companions obeyed the desire of their kind friend, and proceeded to the garden. Lucy, as they entered, whispered,—

"Look, Laura, there is that ill-looking man! I shall never bear the sight of him again."

"That is not according to your usual idea of justice, Lucy. The poor man was not to blame."

"Well, perhaps he was not;—but still he is a shockingly ill-looking person."

"I cannot say much for his appearance, certainly; but many a rough tree bears good fruit."

"I don't believe there is any good in him, however; so come this way, Laura. Had it not been for him we should never have expe-

rienced so much misery as we both did this morning. He began talking to me while I was gathering flowers :—I declare he has the look of a serpent !”

“ Did you play the part of Eve ?”

“ Not exactly. I did not accept his apple, for a very sufficient reason—I was not offered one ; but I listened——”

“ And was beguiled. Poor Lucy !—and poor Laura too, it would have been, if you had left us ! But, really, Lucy, I do not quite understand my father.”

“ Nor I, I am sure,” thought Lucy ; but she made no reply.

They remained some hours in the garden, and then returned by the back entrance to their apartment, passing through the chapel, in which Mr. Penruddock every Sunday performed himself the duty of chaplain. Laura often returned by this part of the mansion, and always paused to breathe a sigh at her mother's tomb : it was a habit, and Laura could not unmoved pass the monument, which

was near the altar, and of the purest and whitest Parian marble, representing a female reclining on the bosom of one who bent over her in agony; but the sorrow was expressed in the form, not in the features, of the figures. Apparently a veil was thrown over the group, of such exquisite workmanship, that the beholders might almost imagine they could lift the drapery that concealed the anguish of the wretched mourner. On a small tablet, on one side of the monument, were simply these words:—

FLORENCE PENRUDDOCK,

AGED XXVI.

Laura could never view this tomb without emotion. Lucy often endeavoured to persuade her not to enter the chapel, but always without success. This evening, particularly, Lucy thought they had had enough of dismals; but Laura persisted, saying,

“You can go the other way, Lucy; I am not afraid of passing through the chapel alone.”

"If you go, Laura, I shall accompany you; but I never can conceive your reason for so often visiting this place."

"Weston would tell you; if you had known my mother, you would feel no surprise."

"But you did not know your mother: you were much too young."

"No, indeed, Lucy, I was not too young:—I still remember the form and face of an angel, which Weston says was my mother; and I remember one particular time my father brought me here, and it was, I believe, soon after my mother's death, for all was black and gloomy; and my father knelt down, and he bade me kneel—oh, I never shall forget it!—Years have gone by, years of which I have no recollection,—but that time is fresh in my memory as if it were only yesterday; still *it is the* memory of a dream, for though some circumstances are frequently clear, yet others *confused,* and I am almost tempted to *the whole* a misunderstanding—the *of a child.* Yet," she continued

musings, and speaking as if in answer to her own idea, "I certainly did hear strange words." Laura stopped.

"Go on, dear Laura. You have before recurred to that time, and greatly raised my curiosity. Do say what it was that caused you so much emotion?"

"I cannot, Lucy—I do not like to think of it—I cannot tell you."

"That you were bid to pray for her whose sin was murder!"—was uttered in a low, but clear and distinct voice. Lucy screamed, and would have fled, but Laura was immoveable, pale and motionless; she stood one moment silent, and then, in tones almost as clear, but much louder than those they had just heard, she exclaimed,

"Who spoke!—who in this sacred place dare utter so vile a falsehood?"

No answer was returned, no sound was heard:—trembling, and agitated, Lucy entreated her companion to leave the chapel.

"For heaven's sake, dear Laura, do not

stay in this dreadful place! I shall die if I hear that sound again, that horrid voice!—Come, pray come!”

“I cannot, Lucy: I must see if the person is still here who dared blaspheme my sainted mother.—Hold me not,” said Laura, as with frantic violence she broke from her timid friend, and hastily ran round the chapel. It did not require much time to open every pew and search every corner—no one was visible:—terrified as Lucy was, she would follow Laura, who, fearless and agitated, examined every part in vain.

“There is no person here,” said Lucy; “pray let us go; and it will soon be dark. If you do not wish to kill me, dear Laura, let us go.”

Laura had eagerly searched, and was satisfied no one was in the chapel. Whoever had spoken those frightful words must have quitted the place immediately. Unwillingly, Laura at length complied with Lucy's request; not that

Miss Penruddock was much more courageous than her friend; but could she bear to hear her mother slandered in that dreadful manner? Slowly and silently they left the chapel. Had Lucy followed her own inclination, she would have imitated the speed of Atalanta, but then Laura must have been left behind.

"Come to our own room, Lucy; we will not visit Weston with such pale faces."

"As for that," answered Lucy, "I believe mine will never be red again. Oh, Laura! that horrid voice rings in my ears."

"I would fain persuade myself we did not hear correctly. Who would be so base as to insinuate aught against the dead, and to a daughter who has been taught to revere the memory of her mother as being superior while living, and venerated when no longer on earth? My father would soon dismiss the infamous libeller from Astol!"

When the young friends did enter the apartment of Mrs. Weston, they found her so much

recovered that any attendance during the night was considered unnecessary. Lucy, agitated and wearied with the unusual events of the day, was rejoiced to avail herself of Laura's request, and retired early to repose.

"You are looking sadly tired and sleepy, Lucy! I will sit an hour with Mrs. Weston, and then follow you."

Mrs. Weston, being perfectly free from pain, and refreshed by a long nap in the afternoon, was inclined to be talkative; while Laura's ideas were engrossed by the chapel scene, and, to Mrs. Weston's surprise, she did not encourage the loquacity which it was her general custom to second and assist, as far as demanding information went. Laura was never tired of hearing, nor Mrs. Weston of relating the events which took place at Astol in the early days of Mr. Penruddock, or the first years of his marriage; but Laura was often surprised, that clear as the memory of the narrator appeared to be on every circumstance of her

father's life till his union with Miss Stanley, and for some succeeding years, yet when by accident or design the conversation approached the period of her mother's death, an instantaneous change took place in the voice, countenance and manner of Mrs. Weston. Laura had hitherto attributed this emotion to regret and sorrow for the loss sustained by the family, and invariably changed for a time the conversation. But this evening the recollection of Mrs. Weston's serious and constrained manner gave an unpleasant and distressing feeling of something fearful and mysterious, thus strengthening the frightful insinuation which, notwithstanding her utmost endeavour, was not to be forgotten.

“ You are very grave, my dear child ; that silly Lucy has made you unhappy by her ridiculous whim of seeing the world forsooth—what can she have to do with the world ? She might have remained there long enough before she would have met another Mr. Pen-

ruddock to guard and protect her, giving her at the same time every comfort, every luxury. The people at Benturn would have cared little whether she lived or died—it will be a lesson; I warrant she will not speak of rambling again!”

“And yet it is natural.”

“What is natural?”

“That she should wish to see the place where she was born, and where she once had friends; nor can I conceive my father’s motive for denying so simple a request. You perhaps can, Weston?”

“I never presume to question any order or directions given by Mr. Penruddock; they are always right and proper in my eyes.”

“And of course they should give me the same impression; and so they ever have, save in this single instance—and another.”

“And what is that other, Miss Laura?”

“The prohibition to enter the Beech Grove. Do not interrupt me, Weston—I am overwhelmed with the intensity of my feelings on

this subject—there is some mystery—some dreadful event—which it is the daily care both of my father and yourself to guard from me, and perhaps the world.”

“Then if such be the case, should not a child respect the desire of her father, and his secrets also, supposing him to have any, though I am not justified in allowing that he has?”

Laura gazed at her companion with surprise and awe:—there was a solemnity, an impressiveness in the manner of the housekeeper very different from her usual cheerful garrulity:—her young auditor paused for a moment, and then answered,

“If my suspicions were not certainties before, your present manner would make them such.”

“I am sorry my manner has that unfortunate effect; but we will drop this subject, young lady; it is painful to me.”

“I will, Weston, and promise not again to recur to what you forbid; but on condition that you answer me one question.”

“Do not, pray, my dear Miss Penruddock,

my dearest child, ask what I must refuse ! You cannot know how I grieve to deny you any request."

" And with this earnestness you would seek to persuade me there is nothing to be known, no secret that you conceal with the strictest care. Oh, my dear Weston, you are not consistent."

Weston looked agitated, turned pale and red by turns, and at length, overcome with emotion, she burst into tears : terrified and distressed, our heroine endeavoured to comfort and soothe her humble friend.

" I am really sorry I have pained you, dear Weston ; I will never, if possible, distress you so again ; but yet, if you knew the agony that oppresses me, which one word from you would remove—Weston, I must ask you—you will use your own discretion as to your reply—I will not demand one—listen to me, if you dislike to answer, or if you cannot, on my word and honour I will never again allude to this subject,

either directly or indirectly : you know I can keep my promise."

"Then say what you wish me to hear; on these conditions I will listen."

"Nay, it is you who are to give me information." Laura hesitated, turned pale, and then in a low voice, scarcely audible from emotion, continued, "My mother was very lovely—very beautiful; have you not often told me she was?"

"More so than any person I ever saw; my knowledge of beauty is confined to those I have seen at Astol; but the visitors here all said the same."

There was a pause in the conversation.—Weston was evidently relieved, but at the same time surprised that her young lady should have made all this preparation for so simple a question, which she had often answered, and nearly in the same words:—her inward congratulation received another interruption when Laura again spoke.

"This is not my demand, Weston; indeed I fear to put it—I fear you will not be able to dispel the torture I at this moment suffer, and which I can no longer endure:—Was my mother good as she was lovely—in one word, was she virtuous?"

Weston gave a slight hysteric laugh as she answered, "Was this your fear?—oh, heaven! how readily, how decidedly I can answer this question! Your mother was an angel in mind, as well as in person; even you, my dear Laura, are not more pure, more virtuous, in thought, in deed, than was your sainted mother!"

"Heaven be praised!" was the fervent ejaculation of the agitated girl, while the tears, that could not be suppressed, gave relief to her overwrought feelings. When she had recovered some degree of tranquillity, she found Mrs. Weston eager to communicate various traits of her mother's high sense of virtue, honour, and integrity: every word was balm to the wounded sensibility of the youthful maiden.

“ I can but wonder at such an idea ever having entered your imagination ! Ah ! had you seen the mournful train that followed the corpse to the chapel, had you heard the deep sobs from those whom your mother had assisted in every way—I remember how they would bless her as she went from one cottage to another, to supply their wants when in sickness or in trouble, and rejoice when they were happy ; had you seen all this, you would never have had one moment’s doubt ! ”

“ My doubts, my fears, are all gone, dear Weston ; you have relieved me from a weight of sorrow,” said Laura, smiling through her tears ; “ but there is one thing I cannot understand—you speak of the cottages, the tenants—where are they ? I have never seen any dwelling near Astol.”

“ My master removed them : he had dwellings erected at the extremity of the estate, and gave the tenants parting gifts to reconcile them to the change, at least Mr. Groves did, for your

father left all to him. I am told they are doing well at their new settlement; but it was a woful day when they went. Why, Miss Laura, there was quite a little village beyond the park-gates, and our chapel used to be full every Sunday!"

"And did my father read the service as he does now?" said Laura, who could not help a slight shudder at the mention of the chapel.

"Service, oh, no!—we had a chaplain, Mr. Bristow—worthy man!—but he did not live long after my sainted lady, and Mr. Penruddock never sought another."

"And has my father never left the manor-house since my mother's death?"

"Never beyond the park-palings."

"For exercise there is space sufficient within; for though I have lived here so many years—you need not smile, nurse, it is only all my life, and however small a space that may seem to you, it is great to me—and during

this time I have never been round my father's park, since I have been old enough to recollect places; one side of this said chase, or park, is as unknown to me as the great city of London is, and perhaps ever will be."

"From what we hear and read, Miss Laura, it is no great loss."

"From what we read, it is not—we do not hear, Weston."

"I used to hear, in my early days."

"And now, my dear nurse, I will leave you to rest, which you will require after having had so much trouble in answering my queries;—and when you are quite well, I will tell you why I put them. Good night, and believe me I am much, much happier than when I entered your room!"

"It is very wonderful to me how you could have been unhappy on this subject. Good night—heaven bless you, my dear child!"

CHAPTER VIII.

'Twas an old mansion, quaint and strange
With rare devices, such as pleased in ancient times ;
Turrets and towers struggled with one another,
And galleries opened wide that led to nothing,
Or rooms that shone with polished oak, and
Garnished well with forms of olden time.

On reaching her sleeping apartment, Laura looked in the adjoining room, and was pleased to see Lucy was in a deep and comfortable slumber. " Agitation has had a different effect on her,—mine has rendered me sleepless; I feel certain if I were to enter my bed at this time it would be merely to wish myself out again; and really this night is so calm, so soft and still, that I shall perhaps recover my composure sooner by not attempting to sleep till my confused spirits have in some measure regained their tone."

As these thoughts passed through the mind of Laura she dismissed the attendant whose duty it was to wait on the young ladies, and

placing her lamp in the chimney she passed into a small room separated from her own by a short passage ; this closet, as it was not unaptly called in former times, was used as a dressing-room. It once commanded an extensive view over the forest, and had been a favourite *boudoir* of the late Mrs. Penruddock: now, in consequence of the plantations which the melancholy owner had increased beyond calculation, there was only a portion of the pleasure-grounds to be seen. The small gallery which connected this *boudoir* with Laura's sleeping-room led to a back staircase, and through another room, or rather hall, into the pleasure-garden. This door and entrance had been made for the convenience of some former lady of Astol, as it permitted egress to the lawns and park without having to travel, as Laura's mother used laughingly to say, over miles of stairs, corridors, and carpets. Though the distance was small from Laura's sleeping-chamber to the garden-door, yet, by being placed at an angle of the building,

the window of the *boudoir* had a different aspect to the sleeping-room, and the garden-door was still farther off—more so in appearance than reality. Several grotesque and odd fanciful projections which had no earthly use nor beauty intervened between the angle of the mansion and the casements of the respective rooms;—a stranger, judging by the exterior, might have supposed there was a long and distant path between rooms that almost joined.

Laura had a great attachment to this little cabinet, which, from time immemorial, had been styled the sea-turret; and many happy hours had she spent there with Lucy. Could the antique personages who decorated the picture-gallery, in all the buckram and formality of the olden time, have been permitted, or rather if they could have condescended to descend, they would not have known the room, which was selected by some dame of yore for the beautiful prospect, stretching over the park through a forest glade, and giving a distant glimpse of the

sea, with its dancing waters and white sails gliding till they were lost in the distance. Often would the beautiful and happy wife of Mr. Penruddock stand enraptured at the view, so lovely and enchanting. They had, she said, the three orders of the picturesque before them—the beautiful, the grand, and the sublime.

“Is it not so, dear William?” she would say to her almost adoring husband. “What can be more lovely than these pleasure-grounds?”

“Only yourself, sweetest.”

“Of course I made that exception. Then how grand is yonder forest! how majestic are those oaks, spreading their huge arms in every direction!—those splendid elms and beeches! How wise your ancestors were, dear love, to keep this opening clear! I always see the merry Sherwood band down yonder glade. And now look at the sea—oh! that is sublime! look at the sun, how brilliantly it shines over the waves! I can almost fancy I hear the dash of ocean

even at this distance, with its proud swell, which says plainly, 'I obey but One!—One all-powerful can alone control my waters, or keep me in subjection! Monarchs of the earth bow down to me!' Can you not hear the waves say all this, William?"

"I hear you, love, and that is better."

"Indeed it is not; and to prove it, let us mount our horses and ride to the beach."

Mr. Penruddock had never visited this apartment since he lost his wife. He could not trust himself where he had so often gazed on all so lovely, both animate and inanimate.

How uncertain is human happiness! A few short years and all was changed—grace, beauty, and virtue, combined in one youthful form, was mouldering in the silent tomb; the earthly part was lost to the husband, friends, and child; but the ethereal spark was where innocence and virtue may ever hope to be, in happiness greater even than the bliss it experienced on earth;—and let discontent and melancholy brood over

the misery and sorrows of this world as they will, to virtue it will ever be a scene of joy and comfort. It is an ungracious return for the numberless blessings we daily, hourly receive, to speak of this beautiful and bountiful earth as a vale of tears and sighs: never to experience sorrow is merely the summer dream of youth while under the exhilarating effect of robust health and jocund spirits. Sweet are the visions of early years—the brilliancy fades at the touch of Time; but if purity and innocence remain, the tints are not less fair though the gay plumage be removed;—the soft hue of the dove succeeds the glitter of the peacock, and both are beautiful.

Youthful maidens in the first dawn of loveliness often reason in this strain; but on this evening, as Laura Penruddock reposed in a large and easy chair by the open casement of the sea-turret, reflections on the instability of earthly felicity occupied her mind so completely that the hours passed unnoticed. Her father's

total seclusion had never till the last few days appeared either so uncommon or extraordinary : no allusion was ever made to the world by any inhabitant of the Manor House, and our heroine's contented, cheerful disposition prompted her to be grateful and thankful for the blessings she enjoyed, without diving very deeply into causes and effects ; but the late events, so totally different to the usual quiet tenor of her life, had raised various contending and conflicting opinions respecting the secluded state of her father's family, which she could neither admit as probable, nor dispel as unreasonable. It might be said, that Laura had really never thought before, and now she was overcome with the intensity of her absorbing and bewildering meditations. Vain were her efforts to clear the labyrinth which seemed to spread and grow beneath her mental sight,—it was a chaos not to be called into order by the puny power of the sensitive girl, whose heart occasionally sunk at the remembrance of the frightful words uttered in the chapel ; and then

again would rely on the assurance of the friend who had known, and positively declared her mother's truth and virtue. Laura would not, could not, question the purity of her mother ; though, by so doing, some solution might be found for the singular conduct of her father. With her slight knowledge of the world, gained only from books, she was still aware there must be some cause for conduct bordering on misanthropy ;—not that he ever spoke against the dwellers on the earth, but he sought no community with them ; and some deep motive only could excuse a man so highly-gifted as Mr. Penruddock for not exerting “ his talent ” for the benefit of mankind. Laura's thoughts wandered from these reflections to the events of the day—Lucy's unfortunate desire to mix the gaiety of a country town with the retirement of Astol—the chapel scene—then the foresters—Mrs. Weston—all passed in succession, till at length they became confused—a mass of wild and wonderful visions ; Mrs. Weston was killing all the gentle gipsies, while Mr.

Penruddock stood by and told her not to spare; and when Laura caught her arm and begged for mercy of those who unresistingly knelt before her, the whole scene changed and the manor-house was in flames. Laura screamed, and starting from her chair, she awoke in the act of escaping the conflagration which her disordered imagination had created; but all was still, all was silent; and the moon, which was now on the wane, beamed so brightly through the broken masses of clouds as they flitted over the deep blue of the sky, that Laura forgot her alarming dream, and determined, after she had admired the bright planet a few minutes, to seek her couch; but sleep was heavy upon her, and before those few minutes were over she was again leaning back in her chair in profound repose.

CHAPTER IX.

Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful jollity,
Quips and cranks, and wanton wiles,
Nods and becks, and wreathed smiles;
And in thy right hand bring with thee
The mountain nymph, sweet liberty.

WE must now return to our gentle foresters, whom we left in deep admiration of the wood nymphs of Astol: anxiously did they hope for their re-appearance, which, they said, was all their seclusion wanted to make it a perfect Eden.

"You have not kept faith with us, Rayland," exclaimed Philip Deverel, when they were enjoying the good things so abundantly supplied by their "tent-keeper," after having been out all day in pursuit of game; of which, as Philip said, there was a plentiful scarcity. "You have not kept faith with us, Sir Walter of the Forest."

"As how, I pray thee, worthy lawyer?"

"When we were first persuaded to take part in this most delectable and Christian-like sojourn, we were to enact the deeds of true and gentle knights, 'brave flowers of chivalry,' who were to be blessed and rewarded by the smiles of beauty. Now, I demand, where are those smiles?"

"I cannot find them in my bond; nor can I call to mind aught savouring of female name or female charms, save such as were to be personated in the character of the wild and witty Rosalind, sustained and improved by Philip Deverel, Esquire, of Lincoln's Inn, Barrister, who, having ceased to sigh for briefs as being hopeless, now sighs for beauty."

"What the devil am I to make love to myself? I'll be d—— if I do. I'll bring an action against you in the Court of King's Bench for breach of contract, for not bringing that pretty Rosalind and Celia a second time on the stage, and so get a brief of my own to commence next term."

"I will supply you with briefs, Philip," said

Lionel, "sufficient to make your fortune, if you will commence *instantly*, and oblige Rayland to produce the damsels ere another sun has passed over our heads."

"Confound you; why apply to me?" exclaimed Walter. "Think you I would act a traitor's part? Make your demands of his Highness Reginald the Duke!"

"I disclaim both rank and title: you have exercised the regal power in all that has hitherto appertained unto our free and jovial company; and my voice is for your continuance in office."

"Office—when applied to a sovereign duke? well, I have no objection; and my first act of regal legislature is to command ye all to assemble in council and enact some lawful expedient to bring those maidens before our royal throne. Do ye murmur, caitiffs that ye are? Are we to seek for you, ye rebel crew? Forbid it, Majesty! Forbid it, Walter the First, of Astol!"

"Our Duke Walter disdains to play King Log!" said Clifford, laughing.

"King Log! no, by my faith, I will be twice

King Stork ere I dwindle to his wooden majesty; but see, who dares break in upon our solemn council and our high debate!" exclaimed Walter, interrupting himself, and at the same time pointing to the entrance of the tent, they beheld a boy, apparently about fourteen or fifteen years of age, with bronzed features, and coarse but clean and not ragged clothing.

"Hollo, my lad," said Walter, "what the devil do you stand prying there for? we have nothing for you to pick up."

"It is one of the boys belonging to the gipsy camp I saw yesterday in the dell about four miles distant," observed Trevallian. "They beat our tents hollow."

"Oh, if he is a brother-vagrant," said Deverel, "let him join our crew."

"Come in, my lad;" Walter beckoned as he spoke, and the boy entered the tent, looking round with admiring eyes.

"We are brothers, my young man," said Lionel; "both of the gipsy trade, eh?"

The boy smiled, and made rather a graceful bow as he answered,

"I belong to a gipsy tribe, but different from yours, gentlemen."

The voice and manner of the boy were gentle and courteous; giving our London foresters an impression in his favour.

"You are of the real sort," said Deverel "your dark hair, brown skin, and gazelle eyes bespeak you of true Egyptian race; we must bow to you."

"And no doubt you are learned in your mystic lore. Can you read fortunes, boy?"

"I have told maidens' fortunes; but gentlemen like you are not often seen in our forest."

"Our forest! do you claim this wide extent of woodland as your own?"

"Nobody warns us off," said the boy, in a rustic manner.

"Have you lived here so long, that your tribe consider it their own?" asked Trevallian.

"I was born here."

"A denizen of the wild," observed Clifford.
"Have you never been beyond the limits of this royal chase?"

"I have," was the answer.

"I thought so; you have no doubt beguiled pretty maidens of their hard-earned wages, pilfered hen-roosts, and cheated the landlady of her due?" said Walter.

"We are not thieves, Sir."

"Of course not; these things are not stealing: but do not look about here, and you shall have a glass of such wine as you never tasted before," said Walter, pouring out a glass of Burgundy, and giving it to the boy, who again bowed, and pledged them, saying,

"Your health, my noble masters, and wishing you a long stay at Astol."

"Thank you, my lad; but have we not kept our word,—did you ever taste better wine?"

The boy hesitated, then replied,

"It is very good, Sir."

"Why, you don't pretend to be a judge of
wine?"

"We have wine in our tent. Our women make very good wine from the blackberry and the elder juice."

"Better than this, no doubt?"

"I don't say that; but it will answer the same: we may drink more than is proper for us."

"True; and in that case the least expensive is the best; but for flavour you never tasted such as you now hold in your glass?"

Again the boy smiled.

"What the devil," said Philip, "do you mean to prefer your beggarly black juice to this generous blood of the grape?"

"I did not smile at that, Sir; but you seem to think no one but yourself has ever tasted Burgundy."

"Why, do you have Burgundy in your tent my young friend?" asked Sir Arthur.

"No; but that does not prevent my having tasted it."

"It is not commonly used as forest beverage."

The boy made no answer. Rayland, who

prided himself on the elegance, as well as convenience of their abode, was rather piqued at the indifference exhibited by a wanderer in woods, and a dweller in tents.

"You are a little philosopher, my man," said he.

"Not much of that, Sir."

"You regard these needful comforts, as if you were equally accustomed to them; in your roving life all these things must be new."

"Not exactly," said the boy, carelessly; "I have seen all these luxuries before,—not here, but in other places."

"You never could have met with silver wine-coolers in your peregrinations?"

"I have sat at tables where the wine-coolers were gold!" answered the boy, in the same quiet manner, as if he were speaking of the beauty of a horse-chestnut or an acorn.

"Pray," said Trevallian, "are you equally well acquainted with such furniture as we have about us?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Then how can you endure the homely tent which you at present inhabit?"

"Happiness is free to dwell where she listeth. Marble halls cannot detain, nor doth the canvass covering exclude her," said the boy.

Our London party looked at each other in surprise. This lad could not be really of gipsy origin. His dark eyes and complexion seemed to speak his race; but his manner, his language, and the tone of his voice, were superior even to the middle ranks of life.

"You cannot always have resided among outcasts and vagrants," observed Rayland.

"I know not what you mean by vagrants," returned the lad. "We seek nothing of you; curiosity led me to the opening of your tent. I sought no alms, nor have I craved charity."

"True, my man; and now I crave of you to take another glass of this prime wine, and if your time will allow, we will ask some information respecting the dwellers in this chase,—our neighbours."

"I can give small account of those who come

to-day, and pass away to-morrow; all of our tribe are migratory."

"As you have resided here from your childhood, you must be acquainted with more than your own roving tribe, by name if nothing more, and no doubt you are not ignorant that this demesne belongs to Mr. Penruddock?"

"I have heard so."

"Then be so kind as to tell us all you know respecting this gentleman; we wish to hear some account of him and his family."

"Your wish for intelligence respecting Mr. Penruddock cannot be gratified by me, gentlemen; he is even personally unknown to me."

"And his daughters?"

"I am not aware that he has daughters."

"Have you ever been in the Manor House?"

"Never!"

"Your tribe has the reputation of searching and prying every where; you would not have any objection to visit the interior of Mr. Penruddock's mansion?"

"It is my first wish," answered the boy, quickly and hastily; then suddenly changing his voice and manner, "we all like to enter where plenty dwelleth."

Deverel laughingly said, "You will not persuade me that you ever want; no, no, my young master, gentle or simple, gipsy or no gipsy, you want nothing that money can procure; my own opinion is that you are some young gentleman on a frolic from school."

The boy made no reply.

"If such be the case," said Trevallian, "we will intercede with your parents."

"I have no parents," replied the boy, mournfully; "I have no one who cares for me.—I am wrong now," he continued, interrupting himself; "but this cannot be interesting to you, gentlemen."

Our kind-hearted foresters assured the poor boy they would willingly assist him.

"I shall want a clerk soon," said Deverel. "Will you be a lawyer, my man?"

The boy shook his head and smiled, as he answered,

"I thank you, no, Sir; but if ever I should require the assistance of law, if you will bestow your advice on a gipsy, you may perchance find your time has not been thrown away."

"By Jove! I shall have a brief at last. You shall have my best advice towards installing you King of the Gipsies; and when I am Lord Chancellor, you shall be my purse-bearer, if by that time you are tired of woodland sovereignty."

"You have kindly offered me assistance and advice, gentlemen; you will confer an obligation if for this night you will allow me the shelter of your roof."

"We are rather confined, my young master; do you require such commodities as a feather-bed, *et cetera*,—because if you do, I fear our accommodation will not suit?"

"Merely permission to rest under the tent."

"Not this tent," said Rayland, looking round on the plate, which, to speak truth, was as

ill-guarded as it was inconsistent with a leafy neighbourhood, which usually has its attendant vagrants in the shape of poachers, smugglers, and gipsies; for though Mr. Penruddock could remove labourers and deter the better class from approaching the manor of Astol, it was not so easy to prevent the dwellers in nooks and caves from haunting his domain. Fortunately for the intention of Mr. Penruddock, there were more temptations on the other side of the forest for all that class of persons; and the Astol estate was comparatively free: there might be some efficacy in three or four large and fierce dogs in various parts of the manor. Our London friends at first found much annoyance in these deep-mouthed rangers; but, by the aid of Reuben Barwell, with whom they made acquaintance, they were likewise introduced to the canine inhabitants of Astol.

“If you cannot consent to my request, gentlemen, I will wish you good evening; my friends are at some distance.”

The boy was leaving the tent, when Rayland called him back, saying,

"You are hasty, my young sir; we were considering where we should bestow one who ——"

"Requires no more than the ground. You have servants; let me sleep with them; I will neither incommode, nor interfere. As for these temptations," he continued, smiling and looking at the silver, "they have no charms for me."

"They may for your tribe."

"No; I will answer for the honesty of my companions."

"Well, then, you shall have a rug in this tent; so now sit down and tell us the laws and regulations of your community."

"They are secret, and will not be divulged by me."

"I believe you," said Deverel, ironically, "if you have modesty enough to request shelter, and feel yourself at home with so many strangers. Why, faith, I think you may boast a will of

your own, and resolution sufficient to support that will."

The boy, instead of answering, or, indeed, appearing aware that any person was addressing him, moved slowly round the tent; and to the great amusement of his hosts, he was soon completely at his ease, inspecting the various articles at pleasure; after a minute examination of the volumes, which were arranged in different parts of the tent, he at length placed himself by a light, and seemed to take much interest in the book he had selected.

"I wonder what our gipsy friend has found so entertaining," said one of the company. "What are you studying, my master?"

The boy did not hear, being deeply absorbed with the volume, which Deverel, walking softly behind, discovered to be one of Lord Byron's.

"I told you he was not a gipsy," said Trevallian, "he will betray his origin ere long."

The young men now pursued their usual

evening's amusement, without paying further attention to their strange guest. They had a chess-board, which employed two of the party; two more sat down to *écarté*; while Rayland walked about the tent, occasionally attending to the movements of each table. The evening wore on without any change, except an observation on the game, or an offer to Walter of taking his turn at the chess-board, which he declined. Once, in his perambulatory excursions round the tent, he looked over the gipsy boy's shoulder, and perceived he was intent on Childe Harold; the boy's countenance expressed his delight.

"Is this book new to you, my young friend?" inquired Walter.

"Not quite; but the words are so beautiful they are always new; look at these lines," said he, obviously forgetting his assumed character, while he read—

'There was a sound of revelry by night,'
nor ended till he had finished several stanzas.

"What a strange effect a few words have on us!" said the boy. "I can almost fancy myself a spectator on that mirthful night, which terminated so differently from the commencement. I am not naturally of a warlike disposition, yet these lines create a feeling of valour, and I could almost wish myself a soldier."

"Possibly such may be your lot in life," observed Walter, who was much amused and interested by the boy's words and manner; "you may pass through every grade and end a hero."

"No," said the boy decidedly, "except under the influence of excitement, I would never be a soldier."

"And why, may I ask your reason?"

"A cowardly disposition perhaps; but, when I reflect on the misery of war, the torrents of blood that have been shed, without attaining, or very rarely attaining, the smallest portion of good, to balance the dreadful havoc and waste of life that must occur in every battle, I shudder

at the name of a conqueror; nor would I incur the responsibility of one battle for all the fame that glory ever gave; and happiness," he continued with enthusiasm, "happiness dwells not with heroes; where there is so much glare and contention, we must not hope for happiness nor peace."

"We should be a tame race of beings," said Walter, "if all were of your opinion, and acted accordingly."

"We might be less miserable."

"At your age," said Walter, laughing, "you can scarcely have made acquaintance with misery; with boys, life is generally a scene of boisterous mirth, till they woo a silly passion, and fancy themselves wretched; but you are too young for such folly."

"There is no age exempt from folly; we inherit it, and are but too ready to adopt it for our own."

"Don't suppose, though," said Walter, "that I call love a silly passion; I made the observation

as it affected boys; real, disinterested love is the first boon of heaven. Man need wish no greater happiness."

"I fear it is happiness too great to be expected here. How few have experienced it pure and unalloyed! and, certainly, not the warriors or conquerors of this world, whose cause you were even now advocating; historians do not detail their lives as being records of happiness; and poets give their testimony that love flies from the glitter and bustle of camps and courts, to seek refuge under lowly roofs."

"And all this," said Walter with a smile, "you learned in your gipsy camp!"

The boy returned his smile, but without noticing the observation, he continued, "There is, I fear, little happiness in this life, and less real love."

"Do you speak feelingly and from experience on this point?" asked Walter.

"Respecting happiness, I do; for love, at fifteen, how little can we know!"

"Fancy and imagination will do much even at that age; and to judge by your language you have felt the influence of both those powers."

The boy sighed as he answered,—“We have sufficient evil in this life without calling in the aid of creative ill.”

“Or bearing those,” said Walter, “inflicted by a close tent with lamps, and the odour of dinner to aid; so, if your morning’s walk has not tired you, come with me before our dwelling, where we may philosophize in Forest-glade.”

The gipsy boy rose without speaking, and walked to the opening of the tent, where the moon shone through the magnificent trees that adorned this part of the forest, casting that mild pale light so proverbially soothing to lovers, and gratifying to all admirers of nature.

“I could almost envy your free and roving life,” said Walter; “you are confined by no trammels so galling as those society has placed round us.”

“You would not approve a forest-home,

when sleet and snow usurp the place of those rich hues which tint the leaves of autumn. A summer gipsy life is well ; but winter—”

“ Has its pleasures also.”

“ In a comfortable drawing-room, with all its embellishments.”

“ I have given you a shelter for the night,” said Walter ; “ will you extend your hospitality to me if my curiosity should prompt me to visit your domicile, and perhaps I may then solve what now appears so surprising ? ”

“ You will find it different from yours, Sir ; but yet we have our comforts, and you will be welcome.”

“ Can you answer for that ? ”

“ Did not your companions speak of you as being commander in yonder decorated camp ? ”

“ You answer my question with another ;—they did.”

“ So my fellow-wanderers consider me.”

“ They do not require age, it seems ; but you are above your years in manners ; you are either

older than you say, or you have been educated in sorrow."

"Does that necessarily imply knowledge?"

"Generally."

"Then I ought, indeed, to be wise above my years."

"Poor boy! you are young to have known grief; can I assist you? your conversation has greatly interested me, and if I have power to serve you—I am rich——"

"So am I," said the boy; "but I will be candid, and own I sought your camp with the intention of seeking assistance, which since I have been in your company I find is not in your power to grant."

"How know you that? you have seen and heard so little of us."

"Sufficient to prove you have no aid to render; but still I will thank you for my night's shelter, and if to-morrow you will accompany me to our tents, you will be satisfied I have no need of benefactors in a pecuniary point of view."

"You are quite mystical. I certainly never supposed, after you had some time been our guest, that you were of gipsy origin; and now I do not even believe you a truant school-boy; so what character to give you I know not."

"If you will take me on credit, I may perhaps hereafter claim your acquaintance, possibly your friendship."

Walter Rayland was exceedingly amused, puzzled, and interested by the conversation of his young companion, who had the perfect ease and self-possession of a man well acquainted with the world and good society, which at his age seemed improbable; and he determined to accept the invitation to the "opposition camp," as they had called it, when they first heard of its proximity.

Rayland and the gipsy boy walked some time silently down the glade where Laura and Lucy had been first seen by the assembled young men. The sight of this opening recalled the maidens to the memory of Walter, and he questioned him concerning the few dwellers on the

Astol estate; but the boy still professed ignorance, saying,

"We have been several months in this part, and we have made no acquaintance; nor is it at all probable that many persons should possess your liberality of sentiment, and converse as you do with a vagrant."

"Remember, we detected you with Lord Byron; as his friend, you could scarcely deserve the term of vagrant," answered Walter, laughing.

The boy made no answer, and for a short space they proceeded in silence. But it is not the privilege of youth to possess the power of concealing thoughts; and though curiosity is undoubtedly a feminine virtue, yet the superior sex sometimes struggle in vain to repress the companion they are ashamed to acknowledge and are unable to dismiss: it does not, however, appear that Walter Rayland felt any compunction when he cross-examined his dark-eyed friend respecting his situation and prospects in

life: his inquisitive desires were not gratified; the boy, if he had a secret, was sufficiently wise to preserve it as such, and our knight of the forest was only more satisfied as to what he was not, than enlightened respecting what he was. At all events, he was acute, clever, and well bred—the well breeding of polished manners, not the civility of a rustic, and Walter insensibly fell into general conversation, forgetting his associate was different from the party in the camp. Walter was so much pleased with his companion, that he heeded not the time, and a messenger was sent from the tents to acquaint him that supper was ready, and had been waiting some time. There had been a grand consultation when they first arrived at the forest respecting the hours for meals, whether they should keep London regulations on such momentous affairs, or sink at once into primitive times with an early dinner and supper, or luncheon and a late dinner; it ended in their having a substantial breakfast *à la fourchette*, dinner,

and something hot, savory, and delicate for supper: as they very wisely observed, they must have amusement; and what better entertainment could they have than dainty fare? and besides, the keen air of the forest created an ungovernable appetite, which must absolutely be satisfied; so the discarded, obsolete, and vulgar supper came not only in fashion but in great repute with our gentle foresters.

"Supper waiting!" said Rayland, "oh, then, we must not make so important a personage wait for us! Quick, my gipsy friend, and let us reach the tent before the broils and relishing bits get cold."

But Walter reckoned without his host when he expected within the next five minutes to take his seat as monarch of the feast; fate had ordained otherwise; they were within ten paces of their tent, when Walter suddenly stopped, and pointing to an open glade of the forest in the direction of the Manor House, he asked his companion if he saw anything?

"Yes," answered the boy, "I do; there something white passing through the bus and brakes. What can it be?"

"Whatever it is, it comes nearer. By heavens, it looks like a woman! are these wraiths, I wonder? for real flesh and blood would never be rambling, as we are, at one o'clock in the morning, or nearly so; we will remain here and wait; if it comes nearer——By Jupiter, I don't half like it!" said Walter, laughing with evident pleasure at the prospect of some excitement.

CHAPTER X.

Both child and nurse are fast asleep,
 And closed is every flower ;
 And winking tapers faintly peep
 High from my lady's bowen.
 Bewildered hinds, with shortened ken,
 Shrink on their murky way.

WE left Laura Penruddock in an easy chair near the window of the sea-turret, in sound repose. The inhabitants of Astol were, with the exception of Mr. Penruddock, accustomed to early hours : the ten o'clock chime seldom had any one listening to the sound but the master of the mansion, who had long relinquished his unavailing attempts at regularity in the time for repose ; like a coy maiden, sleep flew farther from him the more he courted its influence. Often would the care-worn and dejected Lord of Astol pace his library and the adjoining apartments long after the household

had retired for the night; and often would the sun beam on his solitary vigils; when instead of seeking his couch, he would retire to the most secluded part of the domain, nor appear in the dwelling till the hour appointed for his daughter's visit to the library: this duty was never neglected by Mr. Penruddock. Whatever his sorrow might prompt, or however sleepless had been his night, Laura always found her father ready and willing to pursue their morning studies.

Laura had experienced so much excitement in the day, that though at first she felt no inclination for repose, yet when her spirits were calmed by the silence and softness of the night, and sleep stole on her, there was then no resisting its influence. After her first perturbed nap, when she determined on retiring to her couch, she was so completely overcome, that she sunk again into slumber deep and refreshing, from which she at length awoke abruptly.

The moon had been obscured by clouds,

which, breaking suddenly, the light, pale and soft as it was, by its beam passing quickly on her face, disturbed her lengthened repose. She started, surprised at her situation; it was some few seconds before she could recall sufficient recollection to comprehend where she was, and before she left her chair a low whispering sound riveted her attention.

Laura being aware of her father's sleepless and restless nights, supposed he was now rambling about the grounds; but this idea was not warranted by his general habit; he never had a companion, at least she never heard of any, nor was he given to conversation, when by chance his solitude was interrupted by Mr. Groves, who was almost the only person out of the house with whom Mr. Penruddock ever held any intercourse. These meetings were brief as possible, and never, to Laura's knowledge, took place in the night. While she was endeavouring to reconcile the idea of this midnight stroll being shared by her father, in op-

position to his usual habits, the sound came nearer, and Laura was able to distinguish the voices of the speakers—they were neither of them Mr. Penruddock.

At first she remained motionless, that she might not disturb her father; gradually she became still, from dread and terror. Could these persons have any connexion with the chapel—with the terrific words she had that day heard? These thoughts passed through her mind, while silent, but agitated, she awaited the issue; she was haunted by those words so fearfully, so dreadfully uttered.

The window being open, Laura had little difficulty in hearing the conversation that followed.

“Are you sure this side of the house is not used? there is an open window.”

“Does not that prove I am right? if the people slept there, they would shut the window.”

“Not in such weather as this.”

“Well, but I know I am right; you must go

round that tower, or whatever they call it, with all that corner, before you pass where those girls sleep, and then the housekeeper and Mr. Penruddock's room before you reach the rest of the family. No—no, we are quite safe here; but I wish Dick and his friends would keep their time."

"You are wrong in the time, if you are right about the rooms. I tell you again, it is not twelve."

"You be d—d; the clock struck twelve as we passed the stables. What the devil do you think I can't hear? this place is too plaguily silent not to catch every sound."

"You would not have it otherwise than silent with our errand, would you?"

"It's d—d awful though. I don't mind when we are in the streets, or in any place where there is something to be seen besides trees, and heard besides the screaming and snoring of that hideous owl that flew by us just now; an owl always puts me in mind of gibbets."

"You take it as a warning then?"

"What the devil do you mean by that?"

"My meaning 's plain enough. You, with your gallows look, can't expect any other end, and where your betters have been before you."

"And what do you expect—to die in your bed?"

"In my shoes, old boy; neither better nor worse; hang me if I flinch for all the owls, devils, or hangmen in England—live, and live well, is my motto."

"So it was an old parson's, who used to preach goodness and such stuff to me when I was a boy; little I heeded his gab; but 'tis droll enough that your motto should be the same."

"What did he mean by his—the same that we do? to take all we can get, and when we can get it, and enjoy it while it lasts, without asking leave of the owner; was that what your black gown meant?"

"Not quite; he said, 'Pray, boys, pray;

fast and pray; think not of earthly goods; but live—and live well—humbly—meekly.’ ”

“ Oh, confound your drawling; if you go on so you’ll wake the walls of this old building, and then the people will hear of course.”

“ Then my drawling will have a different effect to my old parson’s; his preaching always set us to sleep; it was as good as my mother’s gin posset, and that always made me comfortable for the night.”

As the man spoke, the clock which was fixed in one of the towers gave the usual preliminary notice before striking the hour.

“ There,” said the second speaker, “ there, I told you, the clock is striking, and they are not come !”

“ Wait a moment,” replied the other, “ you will soon hear.”

The chime died away; the deep heavy boom sounded awfully solemn in the silence of the night; but the first speaker was wrong, it was not one; the sound reverberated through the

towers, then died away, and was succeeded by another and another; the men listened in silence, nor did they listen alone. The heart of Laura Penruddock trembled with agitation and fear, but of what she could not tell; the conversation and words of the men were terrific and rude, but they had mentioned no specific purpose; they might be there by order of her father or Mr. Groves; their conversation was frightful, but that did not necessarily implicate guilt; and Laura knew so little of the world that the idea of thieves and midnight house-breakers never entered her imagination; so she trembled, and determined to remain quiet, that she might satisfy the curiosity which painfully oppressed her.

There was a rude stone projection in the turret, just under the casement, which Laura supposed the men occupied, as every word rose plainly and distinctly on her ear. They were now silent, listening to the strokes that told the midnight hour; when the last sound

had ceased to vibrate, one of the men again spoke.

"Twelve; I told you you were wrong, and I'm sorry for it. We have now an hour to wait; on which side of the house does the old man sleep?"

"Quite the other side; but what do you mean by the old man? there is no man in the house older than you are."

"Why, I thought Mr. Penruddock was almost with one foot in the grave—an old worn-out man?"

"Tush—fool, he is but just forty, and you are nearly fifty."

"The devil! suppose he should resist?"

"Why then you must send him before you to—to tell them you are coming when the gibbet is ready,—though, for that matter, it has been ready long enough; but your time is not come."

"You be d——d, and be serious, will you? and say how many men there are in the house besides the master?"

"Why, there's the butler, and the footman, and another man who is valet, I believe; they are all steady, grave, sober men like the master, and there are two or three gardeners."

"If you go on at this rate, I shall tremble for our spoil; so many stout-hearted men will not give in without a struggle."

"You fool! we are not going to wake them, and give them notice, we are come to strip the house of all the waste plate and hoarded gold, that will make us happy for years."

"Very true; but there may be some awake, and what are we to do then?"

"Despatch the wakers, to be sure, if they are such fools as to wake when we jolly Turpin men are taking our due."

"But suppose they all wake?"

"Why then they must all die, and be d——d to them!"

"There are women with them."

"Well, kill them too! all but two pretty little hussies, who will thank us for taking them away,—you shall have one, I'll have the other;

and, as I never heard of any body coming after them, why we'll marry them and live here, lords of the wine and other good things!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Capital! That is the best part of your plan; but now give me proper directions, that, when our comrades come, I may know what I am to do."

"Well then, listen:—This key will open the small door by the chapel; when our men come we shall be ten stout hearts, afraid of nothing; even if the people in this house were fighting men, we should be more than their match; but the master is no better than an old woman; they say he is worn down by sorrow and grief—sin and wickedness more likely! they say here that he never recovered the loss of his old woman—but that's a lie, she was a young woman; however, she was his wife: it's a likely thing a man should break his heart for his wife,—it's much more likely, as I have heard some people say, he gave her a help to heaven."

"Do people say so?"

"Why not exactly in those words; but they sigh, and shake their heads, and look big with something—the people down at the hamlet; he gave her a kick, I've no doubt."

"Why then if we send him after her, we shall be doing a good job,—save the hangman, as they say 'murder will out.'"

"You know if he comes in our way, curse him! he must take his chance. If he's wise he'll sleep through it; we'll not wake him, but if he interrupts us in our lawful calling, he must follow his wife, and make it up how he can with her; 'twill be a funny meeting, won't it, neighbour?"

"Ha, ha, ha! you're a droll dog; but we had better be silent and listen for our comrades. There's no fear of interruption here; but we may as well be ready for them, or Brown Tom will abuse us, as he did about the old madam we stuck in the town, you know where. We nearly lost that job by chattering; it hardly paid us, after all,—this will do better, I hope."

"There's plenty of gold, that I have learned

If she were to alarm her father, that would avail nothing—it might only hasten the catastrophe; there were no neighbours whom she could summon to their assistance. Mr. Grove and Farmer Barwell resided on the domain but she was ignorant in what direction, and she might encounter the villains in the way; to waken Lucy or Weston would be vain. From the account given by the men resistance would indeed be useless; ten men were more than sufficient to overpower the inhabitants of Astor—ten well-armed men! Laura pressed her hands in agony. She thought not of the dreadful hint thrown out respecting herself and Lucy but she saw her father bleeding, struggling, and dying in the hands of ruffians. She would go and wake him, they might escape; but the moment she spoke of entering by the chapel door—a small stair-case led directly from that door to Mr. Penruddock's chamber—they might be there before she could possibly reach the corridor still she would try, the men would not be there

till one,—it wanted some time, and her father might be saved. Swiftly and softly she flew to his door; she tried the handle, the door opened, no one spoke—no one demanded who entered; her father perhaps was not in his bed—possibly he was in the grounds; the villains would meet him—dreadful! She approached the bed, the moonbeams shone through the window, and lighted the apartment; opening the curtain, she saw the bed was empty; her father might be in the library, the chapel, the garden,—she might wander for hours and not find him; what should she do? She almost fancied she heard the heavy tread of the men ascending the stairs—no, it was only fancy. Oh! if she could find her father, they might escape by the turret, and he knew the way to Farmer Barwell's, from whence they could soon return with assistance,—there was little chance of the remainder of the household being up, and probably they might sleep soundly without hearing the robbers, who would in that case convey their booty, undisturbed,—they

would be welcome to the plate, if they departed quietly, without molesting the inhabitants of the Manor House. At one moment Laura determined to leave the house and seek her father in the park; as her ideas turned to the park, like a flash of lightning the recollection of the gipsy tents came over her mind—she could reach those young men—Lucy had heard that they were gentlemen—they would assist her—there was a short cut through some brakes and bushes to the encampment.

Laura rested not to think if the young men were still there. She swiftly retraced her steps to the turret; for a few moments she rested at the window, and hearing no sound save the sighing of the trees, she concluded the villains were still absent, and she might, if her strength did not fail, procure assistance and return in time to prevent even alarm to the family. She considered her better plan was not to call any one for help; by what the ruffians said, they would not be molested if they slept: she trusted

to that, and breathing a prayer for her father, she descended the turret-stair, when cautiously opening the door she was soon on the lawn and on her way to the encampment, or, as it was called, the Keeper's Luck, from some old story of a keeper having found a pot of gold coins when digging under the shade of an oak that grew close to the tents. At any other time and on any other occasion Laura would almost have died with fright at the idea of crossing the park and entering the forest alone and after midnight; but Laura Penruddock was no common character,—timid and gentle as the fawns that flitted across her path, she could, if occasion required, summon more courage and exercise more decision than many a dashing spirited belle, who would deride danger when distant, and sink under the certainty of its approach. Not so Laura Penruddock; retiring and devoid of self in every shape, she was now a heroine; boldly, yet cautiously, pursuing her way, but avoiding the open paths, to her great joy she perceived

the park paling ; she did not think of the gate, but lightly springing over she ran quickly towards the camp.

As she approached nearer, to her inexpressible rapture, the light from the opening of the tent told her the inmates had not yet retired. She hastened forward without observing Walter Rayland, who was standing with the gipsy boy near the entrance ; she quickly passed them and was soon in the tent ; Walter and his companion followed in wonder and amazement at their new visitor.

When Laura was visible to the astonished eyes of the party, they rose hastily at the sight of the young and lovely vision, for such they concluded it was ;—one of the dryads or a wood nymph. Had Laura been deficient in personal attraction, the circumstances attending her appearance would have procured assistance ; the gay foresters were languid with *ennui*, and praying for excitement : this was now presented to them, and in a form not to

be rejected,—a form that absolutely enchanted the beholders in that woodland camp. No cap nor bonnet concealed the youthful face that stood panting at the entrance of the tent, unable to speak or declare her wishes. The gentle foresters, though able, were afraid to speak or move, for fear the sweet vision should dissolve before their admiring eyes.

Our masquerading party were young and thoughtless. Men of the world—men of honour and integrity certainly, but still idle fashionable strollers, enjoying the present and heedless of the future. Their morality was equal, perhaps superior, to many of their contemporaries,—still they were young, gay, and men of the world—the fashionable world; which perhaps is not saying too much in their favour. Our foresters were also rangers in St. James's Street; Regent Street and Hyde Park daily witnessed their gallantry, while the evening balls heard their vows of love, "and, perhaps, ne'er a true one," save now and then in some solitary

instance. Had these light-hearted revellers met Laura in a crowded ball-room they would have poured forth their admiration with their accustomed volubility, and heeded not the timid feelings that shrunk from their overpowering praise.—But in the lonely shades of the forest, and at the silent hour of midnight, with the beautiful and agitated girl before them, alone, with no guard save innocence and purity, the admiration of the young men was only equalled by the respectful attention with which they waited till Laura could recover breath to speak her wish. She pressed her hand to still the heaving pulse and throbbing heart that prevented speech, then threw back the curls to give coolness to her beating temples; no one spoke—it was but a moment,—but to our poor heroine it seemed an age; at length she was able to say, “Gentlemen, I request your aid—” She could utter no more, but that was sufficient;—the spell was broken—the sweet vision was mortal, and mortal man could do no less than

vow to render whatever assistance she might require.

"How can we help you, lady?" asked Walter.

Laura had now recovered her breath sufficiently to say—"There are robbers, thieves at the Manor House, and they will murder my father if you do not aid us."

In a moment all were armed.

"Will you stay here, lady? we have a female who shall attend you."

"Oh, no, no! my father would die if I were absent, even if the ruffians spared him; but hasten, gentlemen, this way!"

"We shall go quicker than you can, lady," said Lionel, as they left the tent and were proceeding through the brakes towards the Manor House.

"Thank Heaven, you can! I will not be far behind; but hasten, gentlemen, keep by the oak you see yonder; make up to the corner turret, there is a door open, the stairs will lead to a corridor, follow that, and you will find my

father's room—run, I entreat you, I will soon be after.”

“ We will not leave you alone.”

“ Yes, yes ; I pray you think not of me.”

“ I will protect the lady,” said the gipsy boy.

“ Oh yes, you may stay ; but run, gentlemen.”

Laura's last words were heard only by herself and companion ; the forest knights were far on their way to the sea-turret.

CHAPTER XI.

Why, if

Your lordship, being robb'd, don't recognise
The rogue, how should I, not being robb'd, identify
The thief among so many? In the crowd,
May it please your excellency, your thief looks
Exactly like the rest, or rather better.

"You had better rest, lady," said the gipsy boy, as Laura endeavoured to keep on in the same quick pace, which was evidently above her strength, that had been nearly exhausted by her flight from the Manor House to the tents. "Stay here, lady, and I will remain with you, or hasten forward for information; on this stump, so well covered with moss, you may recover breath, while I learn what is going on."

"No," returned Laura; "no, I must follow those gentlemen; but, you, my good boy—I will not tire you—you can rest."

"I!" exclaimed the boy indignantly, "I tired—I want rest! It was for you, lady, I

spoke. 'Tell me in what way I can serve you and I will soon prove that self never entered imagination.'

"You can serve me," replied Laura, hastily—"I have not given them clear directions,—and tell them when they reach the end of corridor they must take the left hand—right-hand passage will lead far from my father's apartment; go, my good boy, and I will reward you!"

The boy did not hear the end of Laura's speech; he darted like an arrow from a gun. Our heroine was obliged to wait a few moments to recover breath, and then as quickly as exhausted strength would permit she pursued her way to the house.

On entering the sea-turret the dreadful roar that met her ears was frightfully appalling; oaths and curses of men were mingled with cries and screams of women, occasionally her own name was heard amid the contending roar. Laura's trembling limbs, which

the reinforcement from the camp. Laura flew to her father, screaming piteously, "He is dead, he is dead!"

"No, dearest Laura, he is only faint; the villains knocked him down—see he is now recovering."

And so it proved: Mr. Penruddock was stunned by the blow, which, however, was but slight; on recovering his senses he heard the cries and ejaculations respecting his daughter. The forest party were too busy with the men even to listen to the frenzied questions of the parent; their horrid sounds drowned all others; a happy insensibility relieved his agony, and when recollection returned, Laura's presence removed all terror and anguish.

When Laura was sufficiently composed to observe any object besides her father, she was again startled at the frightful appearance of the room sprinkled in every direction with blood; the wounded man placed on a couch was attended by the gipsy and some of the female

domestics; the ruffians were removed, one of the servants was despatched to the nearest town for medical aid and the civil power to take charge of the villains.

"Why," said Laura, "do they not remove that man with the other robbers?"

"That is one of our preservers," answered Mr. Penruddock; "though how they arrived so providentially to our rescue I cannot conceive; the whole occurrence seems more like a dream than a reality; what could those men expect to gain here? It was scarcely worth while to peril their lives for the small booty to be found at Astol."

"Do not talk, dear father; and to-morrow I will inform you how these gentlemen came to our aid, and why I was absent when my presence was wanted at your couch; pray let Brennar help you to bed. Lucy tells me all the men are safely placed in the steward's room, and the gentlemen are acting as guards; a night's rest will compose your spirits; to-morrow you can thank your preservers."

"I will pray for them to-night, my child, but speak not of repose. And, Weston, how is the gentleman who was hurt in our defence? I fear he is much injured."

"I hope not, Sir; he is faint from loss of blood, but he speaks lightly of his wound."

"Heaven grant he may be right! There is already too much sorrow and remorse on my mind."

"Yours, my dear father! You are always endeavouring to make every body happy except yourself."

"I cannot sleep, Laura," said Mr. Penruddock, interrupting her, "but if you will retire to your couch I will be silent, and that will soothe, perhaps calm my spirits."

The mid-day sun shone full in the chamber, and found the inmates of Astol Manor still in a state of excitement without thought or idea of repose; the surgeon and the magistrate, with the proper officers, arrived, the ancient dwelling was crowded with strangers; no one thought of retiring—all were awake and pre-

pared for the events of the day. The evening, however, presented another change; the ruffians were removed to the county gaol; the wounded stranger, who proved to be our old acquaintance Walter Rayland, was comfortably settled in one of the spare apartments; and the medical gentleman, after remaining with him all day, returned in the evening to his home, saying the wounded gentleman was in no danger, provided he was kept quiet; but on no account must he be removed from his present resting-place. The deputy housekeeper was in a grand bustle to provide beds and other necessaries for the strangers, who were so numerous; it being thought better for them to remain during that night, lest any of the gang might still be lurking in the vicinity of the Manor House.

Perhaps if the thoughts and secret recesses of each mind in the dwelling of Mr. Penruddock could have been exposed to view, there would have been many of the inhabitants of that

secluded mansion secretly rejoicing that some communication had taken place between them and the world, of which, for the last twelve years, they had only dreamed. Mr. Penruddock, however, was not of the number; had the intent been merely plunder, he would have regretted that the villains were interrupted; they might have taken every thing moveable, so they had departed without disturbing the rest of the family. He would have given half his estate had this affair ended without the introduction of strangers into his retreat; still, he could not but acknowledge that these strangers had preserved the lives of himself and his household; and when he remembered the fearful threat of the villains, for more than their lives,—the ruffians had spoken openly before him of their intended abduction of his daughter,—despair and horror were in the idea, Mr. Penruddock was deeply grateful that his Laura had been saved; and he implored forgiveness that one thought of his own comfort had in-

truded. He could not dwell on the reflection without blessing the accident that brought these strangers to the forest, even though it had introduced them to his dwelling, where he had hoped no one would ever intrude. To a retired, melancholy disposition, which for years had been nursing sorrow and cherishing grief, this invasion of his privacy was as unwelcome as it was unexpected; but it should be borne not only with patience, but with gratitude; and how long their young inmate might require hospitality was uncertain; however the term might extend, he would endeavour to relinquish his unsocial habits and cheerfully play the host.

Mr. Penruddock had certainly been creating ideal visions;—"castles in the air" they could scarcely be called, as those fantastic freaks are usually of a gay and joyous nature, not mournful dreams of solitude, of more than convent seclusion for his daughter; and such a daughter! sweet Laura—a creature of "light, life, and love;" the very essence of a poet's dream; no

poet could ever have imagined one fairer in form; and not even fancy in its softest mood could have created the idea of one purer in mind, or more angelic in temper. Though educated in the midst of sorrow, she was not sorrowful; grief had been kept from her with the strictest care: with her all was gay and mirthful; the world merely claimed a passing thought; she saw around her all she had ever known, all she had ever loved or wished to love; each day brought joy and happiness—each evening, peace and rest; she was like a sun-beam dancing in the fields of spring, or a wave on the moonlight sea; her very presence created joy and pleasure; and it was the hope, the prayer of her father that this pure and guileless state might be ever continued. The few moments of remembrance which were occasionally bestowed on the scenes that occurred about the period of her mother's death were too vague, too fleeting, to cause more serious thought than a brief period of recollection and wonder, giving zest to the happy

than Astol; she had lived till her sixth year in a country town, which was a world to what Laura had seen, who had never passed beyond the boundaries of Astol; but though Lucy might "sigh for change," it was merely a sigh; she was happy—very happy; and she anticipated to be more so now they were to live like other people, and have balls and fêtes such as Madam Weston would at times amuse her young auditors with the description of, as being of daily occurrence at the Manor House in the time of its former lady.

Lucy's joyful visions did not interrupt her repose; she was soon dreaming of the gaieties pictured by her imagination, and the morning found her body refreshed and her mind revelling in anticipated festivities.

Mr. Penruddock could scarcely credit his situation, when the next day he performed the duty of host to his preservers. He who had hoped never to speak to man again, save those of his own household, though for the matter of

speaking, he did certainly answer questions, but very few were put to him ! The considerate young men felt for the oppression that evidently weighed down the master of the mansion, and sympathized with the grief which they were told had defied the soothing power of time and hope. Silently the breakfast commenced and finished. Our gentle foresters at length rose to depart, requesting permission to be allowed to call and inquire concerning the health of Mr. Penruddock and his daughter.

"I thank you, gentlemen," was the reply ; "I have been so little used to society, that I fear you will find small amusement at Astol ; but whatever may be our domestic habits, we must always regard our preservers with gratitude and thankfulness ; my daughter shall speak for herself." So saying, Mr. Penruddock rang for Laura and Lucy, who soon entered the apartment.

"I hope, gentlemen," said Mr. Penruddock, "you will never know by experience the full

value of the obligation you have conferred on me; your aid has rescued the only being for whom I wish to live from misery and despair. When you are fathers, you may perhaps conceive the thanks a father cannot find words to utter; but then remember, gentlemen, when you are blessed with a daughter like mine, and to understand the full value of the gift, you must bear in mind that this child is the only blessing, the only remembrance left by one who was an angel in mind and person; one who has slept years in the silent tomb,—one who was adored while living, and whose memory can never be forgotten; she was too pure to be left with mortals in a world of woe and care; while I——”

Mr. Penruddock could bear no more, his feelings overpowered him; sinking in his chair he covered his face with his hands, and remained silent and motionless. Laura had often—had always seen him pensive, nay sorrowful—she had never seen him otherwise; but this burst of grief was new, and it pained the heart

of the affectionate girl, who, forgetting all but her father, threw her arms round him, and sobbed forth her sympathy. Not one eye was dry; the light-hearted and joyous young men, who were perfectly strange to every indication of sorrow, shed the first tears that had escaped them since their childhood.

The forest party, with proper feeling, and respecting the sorrows of their host, were preparing silently to leave the room, when Mr. Penruddock recovering some degree of composure, said—
“ Pardon, my young friends, the agony of a bereaved heart, which I pray you may never know! I will not distress you by a repetition of my acknowledgments; if I can ever benefit you in any way, you will, I trust, add to the obligation by allowing me to soothe my feelings by so doing; if wealth can be available, I am rich in the dross which is truly so to me, and you will render me a benefit by enabling me to dispose of part. Your companion shall receive every attention, and you will at all times be welcome

and the fact."

Our young foresters repeated
being employed if their service
required, and taking a friendly
land, they soon after returned to
camp.

CHAPTER XII.

And yet poor Edwin was no vulgar boy ;
Deep thought oft seemed to fix his infant eye ;
Dainties he heeded not, nor gaud, nor toy,
And now he laughed aloud, yet none knew why.

WHEN Margaret, the servant whose duty it was to attend on the young ladies, was assisting them while preparing to retire, the conversation naturally turned on the late event. In any dwelling the circumstance of its being attempted by midnight robbers would have caused a great sensation : how much more so then must the retired and retiring inhabitants of Astol have felt the terror and fright occasioned by their unexpected and alarming visitors.

" When we found you were missing, Laura," said Lucy—" poor Mr. Penruddock ! I never shall forget his look of agony ; the villains dared to say you were with their party ; and Margaret, how did you recover your fright ? "

Margaret was a woman of very few words; like the rest of the inmates, she was a native of the forest, born and educated in the Manor of Astol, and, like the rest, devoted to her master's wishes and interest; indeed, the self-interest of the household would have prompted them to study the will of their lord, as, independent of their lonely situation, they had every comfort, with the certainty of its continuance; and, by the intervention of Mr. Groves and the Barwell family, those who had relatives in the world were enabled to assist them in every possible way. Interest, united to habit, made the barrier between the inhabitants of Astol and the rest of the community as strong as even Mr. Penruddock would wish or desire.

Margaret was peculiarly adapted for service at the Manor House;—never at any time had she given way to loquacity; she was as unlike Madam Weston as possible, save that she was equally devoted to her master. In her youthful days Margaret had been pretty, and was long

engaged to an attendant of one of the noble visitors at Astol ; but Margaret, like many others, was doomed to experience the inconstancy of man : her admirer was faithless, and forsook her, for a larger portion with a tradesman's daughter. This had cast a sombre shade on her character, even after her disappointment had given way to time and anger. Respectful and strictly attentive to her young lady and Lucy, she was yet not nearly so much beloved as the cheerful and—save on one subject—communicative Weston. In answer to Lucy's question, to the surprise of both her auditors, Margaret rapidly and fluently recounted her frights, fears, and terrors. Lucy remarked, she had often heard of fear driving away speech, but in this case it was the reverse,—Margaret was actually loquacious.

"What a gay time we shall have of it," said Lucy, "if it sets every body talking!"

"It is enough to set every body talking, Miss Moreton," returned Margaret, "when a gang

of blood-seeking villains are let loose in a orderly mansion like ours ; in the dead of night to be awakened by oaths, and swords, and pistols pointed at you ready to fire if you scream for help, and no help to come if you screame so loud for it."

"You are wrong there, Margaret," said the servant, "the help did come when we called for it."

"So it did ; but how it came I can't tell you, and there was our master in the hands of a few ruffians, and he would have been dead in a few minutes if that young gentleman, and the others after him, had not rushed in the room, and saved your father, Miss Penruddock."

"Blessings on them for their assistance," exclaimed Laura fervently.

"It seems quite incredible, that so full a scene of noise and dismay should have occurred at Astol," observed Lucy. "Margaret, like ourselves, never witnessed such confusion ?"

"Never but once," returned the servant.

"Indeed! and when was that?"

"When my lady died there was as much confusion, and more horror."

"Was there?" said Lucy. "In what way?"

But Margaret, though off her guard for one moment, was not long guilty of betraying aught that might be displeasing to her master. Laura repeated the request of Lucy for an explanation.

"Death is always terrible to behold, Miss Penruddock; particularly one so young as my lady, and it was so unexpected."

"I know nothing of death by experience, Margaret; but I can conceive it to be very painful—heart-breaking, indeed, to the survivors; but not horrible, without the person was, what, I am sure, my mother was not, destitute of hope for the future. An ill-spent life may make a death-bed horrible; but surely that word is too strong to be applied to one who has left such devoted attachment to her memory. You, Margaret, would not insinuate aught against my mother?"

"Me! Speak against my lady? Oh, no!"
"She was good and amiable—was she Margaret?"

"She was, indeed!"

"Then, Margaret, you can have no objection to repeat all you recollect of that unhappy when my mother was removed to a better—it is impossible to ask my father, and V is always too much affected. You may if the subject will have great interest for me daughter; sit down, Margaret, and I hope will not distress you much."

Margaret looked as if she did not quite understand. On a repetition of the request she shook her head, saying,

"We were speaking of the robbers, Miss Penruddock; have you heard that the gardener's labourer was one of the gang?"

"No," returned Lucy, hastily; "you mean so, Margaret?"

"Indeed I do, Miss Lucy; he confessed he has been lurking some time in the neigh-

hood, and when the gardener was ill, he offered his assistance, and so found out how to direct the ruffians."

"Well," said Lucy, "I shall always for the future pay some attention to countenance, for this man has a bad expression."

Margaret, by turning the subject to the gardener, diverted the attention of her young ladies from any further notice of her unguarded speech, and they soon after retired.

For some days the inhabitants of Astol remained in a state of great excitement—constantly dreading a return of the villains, though they were all safe and well guarded in the nearest jail. As time moved forward, the members of Mr. Penruddock's family insensibly forgot their late alarm, and the usual routine of their movements and occupations assumed their general quiet and uniform character; indeed, had it not been for the wounded guest they might have forgotten the late event altogether, as Mr. Penruddock gave the management of the affair

entirely into the hands of Groves, the steward, saying,

“There would be sufficient evidence without his, to convict the robbers, and if there were not, it would then be time enough to bring him forward.”

Groves did not agree with his master, but he knew it would be useless to differ; if Mr. Penruddock's testimony as a witness was indispensable, he must be summoned by the authorities, to which no doubt he would submit.

And the wounded stranger was as happy as a wounded stranger could hope to be. When he awoke the morning after his companions departed for the tent, he perceived the gipsy boy sitting near his bed; on speaking, the boy came to him with the inquiry of how he felt, and if he had slept.

“Yes, I thank you,” was the reply; “I cannot be much hurt, I feel so free from pain; but why are you here? I thought you departed yesterday?”

"I am here, Sir, as your attendant; and I hope you will not object to my service."

Rayland mused a few moments before he answered, "But you are unknown to me, my young friend; and how can I introduce any one into Mr. Penruddock's family?"

"I do not seek to be introduced to the family—as your assistant or nurse I will do all you may require."

"I thank you, my kind lad; but this is a singular circumstance. I do not wish either to distress or wound your feelings, but remember we are only the acquaintance of a day; and though I have doubts on the subject, yet you are known to me only as a gipsy."

"But that does not imply that I am not to be trusted."

"Assuredly not; but yet——"

"But yet what, Sir?"

"Your tribe are not usually admitted into the dwellings of gentlemen."

"Perhaps not, as a tribe; but one solitary

"But will you not
Indeed, you shall find
no recompense, only
remain with you at Astoria.

"That," said Rayla,
believe, the cause of the war.
My desire is to continue in
not?"

"It is," replied the boy
hesitation.

Walter reflected a short
continued the conversation.

"I cannot conceive you
yourself, can I intrude
so little, and who has power
belonging to a race proverbially
"True."

cient to prove you have been very differently educated, however you may have been born?"

"Then if your impression of my manners and words is favourable, can you not act on that impression and permit my attendance? You will not, Sir, be questioned—it is all arranged, Mr. Penruddock has consented; then do not you, Sir, destroy all my hopes—all my labours—all that I have waited so patiently for during long and tedious months; what can I say or do to prove I may be trusted?"

"Your visit to our tent was to procure admission to this dwelling?"

"It was. Months have been passed in seeking an opportunity;—Heaven has at last favoured my efforts——"

"Rather odd instruments for Heaven to choose to aid your purpose. I should have supposed those robbers could have little to do with Heaven."

The boy heeded not the remark, but pursued his entreaty,—“and when after I had almost

despaired of succeeding, to be so strangely — almost miraculously — brought here; do not, kind Sir, deny me your aid, I am not of gipsy origin."

"That, I can tell you, my young friend, is very evident, and it is also very evident that you are not ignorant; on the contrary, you are well informed and sensible. But you shall judge. Can I take advantage of Mr. Penruddock's hospitality to intrude one of whom I know nothing (save that he is not what he seems) into his family? No, no, you must feel I cannot do so. Go to our tents; you can remain with my companions, and when I return to my father's house you shall go with me. I feel greatly interested, and will introduce you to my mother: if you are worthy, for my sake she will assist you; we will attend to your future prospects in any way you may wish; but I cannot take advantage of the generosity which has extended a home to me, to introduce one who evidently would be an unwelcome guest — Be generous, my young friend, I know you can —

be just, and acknowledge you require too much."

The boy made no reply, but appeared the very image of sorrow and despair. Rayland was, as he said, much interested, and felt great curiosity to know the motive for the boy's request, but he forbore to ask. Feeling so much interest, he almost doubted his own steadiness, and feared he should not be able to hold his determination. To prevent any tendency that way, he resolved not to question the boy relative to his motive, but insist on his immediate return to the camp.

"You do not answer me," continued Rayland. The boy sighed deeply. Again Rayland repeated his demand,—the boy at length replied,—

"Is it not sufficient, Sir, to prove the justice of your observations, without requiring me to acknowledge what will destroy all my hopes? the criminal is never required to pass sentence on himself."

"But you, not being a criminal, may acquit

me of unkindness, when acting so differently to what you require."

"You are right, Sir, I cannot deny that, nor am I wrong; but I must submit: farewell, Sir, I trust you will soon recover."

"You will wait for my recovery at the camp?"

"I thank you, Sir, I must seek some other introduction."

"Can I assist you in any other way?" said Walter, who was really much distressed at the boy's dejection, and in justice obliged to confess that if he had not been sent after them by Laura, their interference would have been too late to save Mr. Penruddock; as they were pursuing the contrary turning to that gentleman's bed-chamber. The gipsy boy was taking a mournful leave of Rayland, when Mrs. Weston entered the apartment, and inquired where he was going.

Walter answered for him, "that he was about to return to the camp."

"I thought he was your attendant, and was to remain as such, Sir?"

"It would be intruding too much, Madam, on Mr. Penruddock's hospitality."

"No, indeed, Sir. My master was rejoicing that you had an attendant of your own."

Rayland was about to reply, disclaiming any connexion or intimacy with the gipsy, when the imploring looks of the agitated boy, whose countenance brightened with renewed hope, checked his words; and though Walter did deny the fact of the boy's being his peculiar domestic, he concealed the circumstance of his being totally unknown to him till the preceding evening. The boy had previously gained the good opinion of Mrs. Weston, by the anxiety he had shown both for Rayland and Mr. Penruddock, and by the alacrity of his movements, and ready conception of those orders, which were to such secluded persons difficult to give, much more to execute. The idea of having a sick stranger to

nurse was almost overpowering to the bewildered housekeeper.

"Whoever can wait on him?" was the thought of the moment. "Brennar has to attend Mr. Penruddock; George and James have both sufficient occupation; the women servants are out of the question, and they have plenty of work. Lord help me, I am good for nothing, and, besides, I have those dear children to attend; this lad must stay." Her mental reflections were communicated to Rayland, who perceived it would be useless to contend with her; he therefore gave up the point; but when Mr. Penruddock visited him in the course of the day, he explained to him clearly and distinctly how he was situated in regard to the boy; stating, at the same time, his firm belief that the boy was superior to his apparent rank in life. Mr. Penruddock's opinion, after some few minutes' consideration, was that the boy should remain if Rayland did not object.

"Certainly not," was the reply; "I only

gret having caused so much trouble and confusion to your family."

"It would be useless for me, Sir," returned Mr. Penruddock, "to say I rejoice at what has occurred. If you have been any time in this neighbourhood you must be aware that we live in a state of utter seclusion, which it was my utmost endeavour to prolong and guard inviolate. It has not been permitted that my desire should be granted; never till the night you so bravely assisted us has a stranger been under my roof during the last twelve years. A frightful necessity rendered your presence not only needful but welcome, and I trust the gratitude and prayers of my family will be daily offered and accepted for your welfare, and I hope some earthly method of exhibiting our gratitude will be granted. Our privacy being broken, it is not so material whether by one or two. As your opinion of the boy is favourable, and you intend conveying him to your own abode, I can perceive no objection to his remaining at Astol.

Being aware of his origin, we will not leave him quite so unguarded as if he had been long known to you ; still, having been so many years a dweller in the forest, I must say this in vindication of these people, that they have never in any way injured or annoyed me ; they are welcome to the sticks they break off my trees, and the few birds or other wild animals to be found on my manor. This they know, and they appear to seek no more : had all the natives of the forest been as reasonable and contented, the late outrage would never have taken place. My decision, if you consult me, is for the boy to remain while you, Sir, are an inhabitant of the Manor House ; and he will, no doubt, aid my servants in their endeavour to serve you, till your health is perfectly established."

CHAPTER XIII.

The crow doth sing as sweetly as the lark,
When neither is attended ; and I think
The nightingale, if she should sing by day
When every goose is cackling, would be thought
No better a musician than the wren.

WHEN Walter Rayland's companions returned to their camp, they arranged themselves round the table to discuss a bottle of wine, or perhaps bottles, and also the late event.

"Well," said Deverel, "that Walter is a lucky fellow !"

"Lucky ! with a wound that will confine him a month or more," exclaimed Trevallian.

"Yes, lucky for all that," returned Lionel ;
"the doctor said there was no danger ; he has only to be kept quiet, and be waited on by those two beauties—by Heavens ! who would not be wounded to be so rewarded ?"

"Who indeed !" answered Philip. "Why

I would willingly lose a leg or an arm to have that divinity hover about my bed, and be arms and legs for me!"

"Who would not? But I question much if Rayland, with all his luck, as you call it, will have that pretty girl for his nurse."

"You know nothing of these matters, Trevallian; your head is full of Flora. The goddess of flowers drives away the goddess of beauty and of reason too, or else you would see the necessity of his having a young and beautiful attendant to dress his wounds. Oh, it would be contrary to the rules of chivalry if it were otherwise. Are not all knights-errant rewarded by the smiles of the lovely maidens whom they have rescued from the fangs of monsters, the jaws of dragons, and the wickedness of giants? By-the-by, though, as we all assisted, we ought all to share the reward."

"Right, Delaval!" exclaimed Philip; "that is law and justice both; and my advice is, that we all go and require aid and the smiles

of beauty to cheer our toils and care-worn frames."

"We shall miss our commander, I fear; but the two months are nearly expired, so perhaps our tents would strike, at any rate, ere long to marching orders."

"This last week has been more to my taste," said Deverel, "than our whole previous sojourn; and now you talk of the camp removing, such a stirring night as that at Astol would well pay one for a year's seclusion."

"You should have been a soldier, Phil," observed Sir Arthur; "there are no adventures of this kind in chambers, with 'Coke upon Littleton' and 'Blackstone' always at your elbow."

"We have some amusing trials though, sufficient to keep our faculties alive; and then we always have the benefit of a roof to cover us, and though we speak daggers we use none,—so I'll e'en keep to my vocation, and leave you, Sir Arthur, the chance of being Commander in Chief, like your great namesake. After all, a

chamber, with its dingy walls and musty records, is not to be despised, when there are plenty of clients, with their whims and passions to torment, and their gold to soothe and reward the poor devil of a lawyer, who has to struggle with long-winded explanations and long-scribbled briefs."

"No, Phil, you are wrong; you have never had this struggling and impatient attention."

"All in good time; and to make sure of one client, I'll walk over the park in the evening, and pay my respects to the little gipsy who has promised me his patronage."

"I will be your companion," said Sir Arthur; "I shall have no objection to view the interior of this old mansion-house with all its 'appurtenances,' to borrow one of Deverel's phrases."

"You would not pay a visit to-day? why we have but just left. What the devil," said Delaval, "do you want to be forbidden all intercourse? Depend on it, the melancholy master of this manor will be more thankful for a breach

of etiquette than a strict observance of that duty."

"I believe you are right," returned Sir Arthur; "we must not make Mr. Penruddock's abode a house of call for strollers and idle gentlemen, who are so absolutely destitute of occupation that they are constrained to seek pastime in wilds and wildernesses. My advice, if you all wish for it, is to strike our tents and depart for our respective homes, where we may, as the days shorten and the cold increases, have some few comforts, which, though we have not yet required them, we soon shall."

"We must not go till Walter is able to accompany us," said Philip.

"I fear," returned Trevallian, "it will be some time before he can travel these rough lands, for roads they are not. He is in good quarters at any rate, so we need not distress ourselves about him—however, we can wait a few days before we decide. The weather is sufficiently fine at present to make our sojourn here

not quite so imprudent as it will be some few weeks hence, when the white frost will nip us in the mornings and evenings. I, for one, shall then prefer a well-furnished drawing-room or library."

Our forest gentlemen did not immediately determine to remove their quarters. A few days passed over without any prospect of Rayland's removal being practicable. Though in no danger, rest and stillness were absolutely necessary for his perfect recovery. An effusion of blood might be apprehended if a removal were attempted—such was the surgeon's opinion; and, as the daily visits were very inconvenient to the medical gentleman, it was to be presumed that the danger was not ideal. When Walter could bear the journey he was to make some stay at the hunting-seat belonging to the family of Delaval. As Mr. Smithson, the surgeon, assured them there was not the slightest danger while Rayland remained quiet, he declined acquainting his friends respecting his present residence

and accident, alleging the terror it would occasion to his family, and the inconvenience it would be to his host if any of his relatives were to visit Astol. As he told Deverel, "It was quite clear they would never have been admitted as visitors. Whatever Mr. Penruddock's reasons might be, he certainly had no wish for theirs or any other society; and it would be very hard on the poor man, if, because he was so unfortunate as to have his house attempted by robbers, that he must, as a second trouble, have it inundated with visitors. Now I know my good mamma would worry herself to death if she were aware that her pet son was tied up by the leg in any old gentleman's old mansion. Why bless you, man, she would bring down a waggon load of doctors, nurses, and medicines, enough to drive every person out of the little sense they may chance to have;—and between ourselves, I believe we are all in a bad way. Some of us are mad from whim, others with mystery; for, to tell the truth, this is the most mysterious place

I ever met with;—and some of us are half mad with love, and I expect I shall be so too when I am well enough to see the divinity who inhabits this antique abode.”

“ If you talk so much, you will go mad with fever, Walter,” said Philip, “ and then, perhaps, I shall go mad with grief; so prithee my good fellow rest quiet, and your lady-mother and the pretty Flora shall remain in blissful ignorance.”

“ And yet, Phil, what pleasure it would give me to have my sister and that beautiful girl acquainted; but tell me if you know which is the daughter of our host; he has but one I am told.”

“ That is really more than I can answer; but what do you say about our tents being raised? the nights are cool and long, and verily, Walter, we miss thy social converse.”

“ I trust you do,—I would not wish to be a mere nobody,—an acquaintance of the day. I would have you all lament and mourn my absence; and verily it will be better if, to console

yourselves for such grievous loss, you were to return instanter, and leave me to my fate."

"No very bad one,—but, Walter, how often hast thou seen thy pretty nurses?"

"Not at all, since the first night we entered here."

"And have the domestics given you any clue to the wonders of this place, which we know are great and manifold?"

"No, indeed; but Phil, I tell you honestly, man, you will never learn aught by me; if there are any secrets, and they come to my knowledge, you shall find they can be kept securely."

"In your giddy head, Walter?" said Philip, interrupting the invalid—"well, keep them if you like; but the master of this mansion, how often do you receive a visit from him?"

"Every day."

"Really!—Why then I fear you have too much of a good thing."

"The master of the house is truly kind, hos-

pitiable, and friendly; if I am unwelcome he does not let me perceive it, and during his short daily visit he proves himself a perfect gentleman, and an intelligent companion."

"He can know nothing of the world."

"Not of the present world; but he must have been much in society in his early days, for he is well acquainted with the times in which we were sucklings in the lap of life."

"And his female dependents,—does he ever mention them?"

"Never, except when I inquire concerning their health; but I have found out the names of the wood nymphs. The daughter of Mr. Penruddock is called Laura. Her friend, and, as I have learned, companion from her earliest years, is a Miss Lucy Moreton. That is all I have ascertained; for the people here are not over-communicative: but which of the maidens visited our camp on that eventful night is more than I have been able, with all my wisdom, to find out."

"Perhaps neither of them was our camp vision, for verily she seemed more than mortal, something above this mundane sphere. But you are not quite the lucky fellow we imagined you, for our ideas were busily employed with envy, hatred, and malice, when we pondered on the probable, or what appeared probable, situation of your sojourn in this mansion of wonders. We pictured you with this "Ladye of the Wood," nursing, soothing, and amusing your hours of ease; but as you are left to the guidance and attendance of old crones and waiting men, why perhaps we may forgive you for being an inmate with our fairy of the forest. But now to be serious,—Mr. Smithson informs us you are not in the slightest danger."

"True," returned Rayland, "but he gives no hope of a speedy removal, which is sufficiently irksome, and there is small hope of my being able to join again our summer camp."

"I fear not;—and in that case, as the time is nearly expired——"

"Why the best thing you can do," interrupted Walter, "is to remove as soon as I will. When I am allowed to leave I will up my abode at Delaval's, where he tells you will all be at Christmas; but long before I trust I shall be able to climb any tree in forest. My host is a gentleman, and, as he is daily endeavouring to add to my comfort certainly he never gives me reason to suppose I am an intruder; but from what little I learn I am the only person, male or female, who has entered the house as a guest, during the last twelve years, and, from Mr. Penruddock's habits of seclusion, I fear I must be sadly in his way; depend on it, as soon as my society will permit, I shall make my parting acknowledgments. So now, Phil, go and consult about your departure."

The society and management of Walter and his land were not, as he observed, sufficiently appreciated by his companions, till he was no longer able to take the lead and direction of

Woodland Home. The "gentle Foresters" missed his ready conception of what was requisite, and his alacrity in procuring and providing for their daily wants. There was a chasm beyond their power of remedying, and, after a few more days, which passed wearily and heavily, they broke up their camp. Before, however, they left the forest, they made arrangements for communication with Walter by the assistance of Delaval, and after receiving the grateful acknowledgments of Mr. Penruddock, for the essential service they had rendered him, they bade farewell to Walter, and departed to their respective homes.

CHAPTER XIV.

Let me play the fool;
With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come.
Why should a man, whose blood is warm within.
Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?
Sleep when he wakes, and creep into the jaundice
By being peevish?

A MONTH passed away from the time that companions of Walter left the forest. Mr. Ruddock, from paying his daily visit as a duty and most unwillingly, at length went through all the gradations of bearing an inconvenience from necessity—then considering it no inconvenience—and at last receiving positive pleasure from the intercourse between him and his grandchild, indeed, it was scarcely possible to resist the impression conveyed by the candid, open, cheerful disposition of Rayland. Mr. Penlock, to his own surprise, found himself irresistibly seeking the apartment of the invalid; when Walter was allowed to leave his com-

many hours were spent by the melancholy master of the mansion in the society of our hero. Occasionally Laura and Lucy were of the party; and if Walter admired the "vision" in the tent, he was now altogether absorbed in admiration of the sweetness, grace, and intelligence of his youthful hostess. Poor Rayland! it was all over with him,—he was deeply in love; and the hours appeared to fly with the rapidity of lightning when Laura accompanied her father in his visit. Laura was equally pleased with their young guest, but not with equal devotion. Rayland's passion had fast ripened into love, while she felt only pleasure. Still there was no cause for him to despair; he was the only young man Laura had ever spoken to, save in the memorable meetings in the forest, and Walter felt no fear for the result. Our hero was not deficient in a little touch of vanity. "In person, manner, and acquirements, there can be nothing to which either herself or her father can object," said Walter to himself, when

debating the probability of his acceptance or rejection. He had quite decided as to the result being made. "And soon;" as he justly remarked when he was mentally soliloquizing, "if my pretty Laura gets known to the world, with her father's estates in addition to herself, why, the world will go mad after her. Dukes, I and Baronets—oh! poor Walter Rayland stand a small chance! But here, where she has nothing of all this grandeur, a mere country squire, with some few thousands yearly, may be deemed contemptible. But will that be right?" said Walter, interrupting himself. "Not if Laura formed to grace the highest station, titles, dignity, and honour? Why should I place her in comparative obscurity?" "What was it obscurity? As a gentleman of an aristocratic race he was equal to any,—what was the mere title? But would Laura think so? If she were what he supposed her, she would. These cogitations were not always decided to the satisfaction of Rayland. He would plac

respectability of his family, their worth and amiability, against the rank, titles, and wealth of the nobles who would sigh for Laura, when she would be known. His reflections usually ended with the entrance of the object, when all reasoning, generosity, and disinterestedness vanished before the charm of her presence; and Walter forgot all but the passing moment. He would not declare his love while at Astol; he would first speak to his father,—not that he had any fear from that quarter—every father would welcome such a daughter-in-law; her property as an heiress would be more than sufficient recommendation to any family, even the first in the kingdom.

In the mean while, though Walter forbore to declare his affection by words, yet his actions spoke plainly,—every look, every word had Laura for its object. In no other place could they have been unnoticed; but Mr. Penruddock and Mrs. Weston considered Laura as a mere child; years had stolen by without notice; Mr.

Penruddock heeded not the time, which, had it been altogether annihilated, would have caused him no sorrow ; while Mrs. Weston, in the daily routine of domestic duty and employment, took no account of days that were ever the same and unvaried. To the inhabitants of Astol the sameness of their life was not irksome ; they had always been accustomed to the isolated situation of the Manor House ; and though they had known it in gayer and happier times, yet those days of revelry had so long passed away, that the remembrance of them was also gone, or they were remembered only as a dream, and as a dream which they had no wish to renew. The dead could not be recalled, nor could the elder inmates forget the friends they had loved in early life : nor could they believe it probable that mirth and revelry would ever revisit this ancient dwelling ; but time, the grand softener, had done wonders, and all save the master were contented, if not happy. Mr. Penruddock had suffered so much in past

years that, unlike the generality of mankind, he thought not of the future. Hope appeared to have died within him. He did not consider himself to live; he only existed, and suffered existence for the sake of his child; and, strange to say, he never thought deeply on what might be her fate if he were to be removed. If by chance the subject entered his mind he dismissed it quickly as unnecessary. Laura would have wealth in abundance, there would be plenty of persons on the estate able and willing to undertake the management of it for her, and she might live and die in peace in the abode of her ancestors.

It never occurred to Mr. Penruddock that his solitude might be invaded; the precautions he had taken to make a wilderness of the domain secured him, in his idea, from all chance of such an event. With this impression he felt no anxiety on her account—no fear that she herself might wish to visit the world.

Twelve years had elapsed, and Mr. Penrud-

dock had met with no obstacle, no interruption to his plan of retirement; and even now, when he had a stranger under his roof, and that stranger was young, gay, and every way calculated to engage the affections of his daughter. It was impossible to resist the candid and cheerful disposition of the visiter, who gained on his host without effort or intention; but the idea of Laura's being influenced in the same way never occurred to her father, and principally because he had never ceased to regard her as being scarcely a child. Years not being noted by Mr. Penruddock, he might perhaps have been puzzled if any one had inquired the age of his daughter. Under this impression of her security, Mr. Penruddock had never deemed it necessary to place any restriction on the intercourse between Rayland and the youthful maidens at Astol. When Walter was sufficiently recovered to leave his room, the servants would wheel him into the drawing-room, then Laura, Lucy, and Mrs. Weston were usually his compa-

nions for the rest of the day ; Walter would sing with Laura, and promise to dance with Lucy when able, "and with you too, Mrs. Weston." He had been amusing them for some hours with his gay and animated description of their forest camp. "We will have a ball-room erected where our camp stood, and you, Madam Weston, shall lead off with me in a waltz."

"A waltz!—what is that, Mr. Rayland?" asked the good lady, who had seen country-dances out of number, but waltzing was unknown, even by name,—“a what did you say, Sir?"

"A waltz, my dear partner; I'll whisk you round like a top!"

"A what? Do speak plainly, and say what you mean by a waltz?"

"Why then it is a dance where you turn round and round, like——like what—let me see—why like a ventilator, such as I have seen fixed in windows for air."

"And do you call that a dance?" asked Laura.

"Yes, and a very pretty one too, Mr. ruddock."

"What like a whirligig?"

"Something like it, indeed."

"Well," said Weston, laughing, "they can account for your visit to our forest those giddy young gentlemen. When I heard of it, I said you must all be mad; it proves, for no brains could stand whirling as you describe your dance."

"And is that the only dance you have commanded Lucy."

"Oh, no; we have quadrilles, gallopas zurkas, coquettes, and shawl dances."

Walter, at the request of his command, described these several dances, to the amusement of his auditors. Mrs. Weston, ever, shook her head, observing, that they did not improve."

"And why do you judge so, Madam?"
"I assure you, these dances are all very and very graceful."

"They may be; but they cannot equal the dance our lords and ladies used to exhibit in the great hall."

"And what sort of dance was that?"

"Why, in the first place, the master of the ceremonies, or the lord of the mansion, would lead a gentleman to the first lady in the room, and when he had made his bow, the lady would give her hand, when he led her to the top of the room, with such grace and dignity; and then another gentleman led another lady beside her, and so they went on, till sometimes there were twenty ladies all of a row, or more; and then the lords and gentlemen would place themselves opposite the ladies they led up, till they made quite a long line all down the hall. And then the top couple would dance down till they came to the bottom, with such pretty figures and such merry tunes, it would do your heart good to hear them; and it was a gay sight to see them all dancing together with such glee and animation. Ah, you have nothing like that now!"

"Yes, we have," returned Rayland; "your measure is not quite discarded. We occasionally show it off."

"By another name then, I suppose?"

"Why yes; I believe the name is changed."

"And what may they call our country-dance?"

"They call them kitchen-dances."

"Call them what!" exclaimed Mrs. Weston, drawing herself up in disdain. "What did you say, Sir?"

"You must not be angry with me, Madam Weston, if the world has grown unpolished in its terms; but they certainly do call them kitchen-dances."

The spectacles absolutely dropped from Mrs. Weston's nose, at the enormity of the offence, and she said her hair "stood on end," but fortunately having a neat quilling of muslin and lace under the chin, the cap was kept in its proper situation, else, probably, it would have followed the example of the spectacles and have removed from its resting place.

"And do they allow them to be danced in the kitchen, Sir?"

"Why, I believe not, I rather think they—I mean the servants—scorn our native dance, as they consider it vulgar to show off in anything below a quadrille."

"Mercy on me, is it come to this! Why, my Lady, and all the Lords at Astol, danced them; and once we had the Royal Family here, and a fine family it was of princes and princesses, with the Prince of Wales at their head, and they all danced this dance, and pleased enough they were; and my Lady, Mr. Penruddock's mother, danced with the Prince; he was a beautiful young man, and looked like an emperor; and my master's father danced with the Princess Mary, and she was a beauty too! This was before your father's time, Miss Laura: but if you had seen how grand it was,—there was a row of ladies, princesses, at the top, then duchesses and countesses, and baronets' ladies, and all in order;—and now to pretend that the

hussies in the servants' hall despise what has danced ! ”

“ There were minuets in those days, Weston.”

“ Yes, indeed there were, and to gracefully they walked them ! ”

“ Just like the picture of Sir Charles son and Miss Byron, in that book you fond of looking into,” said Laura.

“ Just so !—The Prince held up his hand like Sir Charles, and the lady, your great mother,—oh ! she was a stately lady, was dressed like Lady G., just such a silk,—oh, it would stand of itself !—and my lady's sister danced with the Baron Osnaburgh ! ”

“ The bishop !—Surely a bishop would dance ! ”

“ Ah ! but you know he was not a bishop.”

“ Not a bishop ! ” said Lucy, “ then did you call him one ? ”

“ Why, because that was his title, but

no bishop,—he was the Duke of York;—and very handsome and grand he looked when he was dancing with Lady Ellmore, but not so grand as his brother, the Prince. Ah well, how time has passed! they must be old men now, if they are living at all."

"Oh, yes," returned Walter, "there have been very few deaths among them, except the old king and queen, and your friend the bishop."

"Hush, Mr. Rayland, do not speak lightly of those above us. And is the Prince of Wales living?"

"Yes, as King George the Fourth."

"Does he not make a good king? And is he married?"

"He is a widower now."

"Well-a-day! there is sorrow for all, you see, my dears; we are never, in any station, exempt from calamity; even his Majesty has to mourn the loss of his wife."

"Not very much, my good lady; it was no heart-breaking business with him."

" Mr. Rayland, Sir, I am sorry to find you speak so freely ; but kings, and personages of the royal house, should not be mentioned but with reverence."

" We will not mention them at all. I would much rather hear you recount the exploits of your early days, and the legends of this Manor House, for sure such an antique building as this must have many marvellous tales belonging to it."

" Nothing so marvellous as you have been telling, Sir."

" I have been only relating facts."

" They are wonderful ones, at any rate, and astonishing to us who know nothing of the world."

" But, my good Madam Weston," said Lucy, " we have wonderful things occurring at Astol, in the way of the world, I mean."

" What do you mean, Lucy ?"

" Why, first there is Mr. Rayland's attendant. I am sure he is the strangest boy I ever heard

mentioned. Reuben Barwell tells me he belonged to a gipsy camp, about four miles from Astol."

"And I belong to a gipsy camp, Miss Moreton," returned Rayland, wishing to turn the conversation from his forest companion.

"Yes, Mr. Rayland, but not such a gipsy camp as his; you were gentlemen on a frolic, and he is a real gipsy, so the servants say, by his complexion."

"But what is there so astonishing in that, Lucy?" asked Laura.

"Nothing very extraordinary in that, to be sure; but he professes to be here as the attendant of Mr. Rayland,—a pretty attendant he is."

"I find him very attentive, Miss Moreton, always ready and anticipating my wishes."

"And when," continued Lucy, "Mr. Penruddock mentioned that he was to remain here, he said it would be a great help for the other servants; but bless me, this boy knows how to do nothing but talk to his master."

"I hope," said Rayland, gravely, "he gives no offence or trouble to the household. I will speak to him——"

"Oh no," replied Lucy, hastily; "but I am amused to see how well he manages to get those things done for him, which he by right ought to do himself; being a gipsy accounts for his ignorance in these matters. But what does really surprise me, is, that he pays the servants when he wants anything done; that is, he offers to pay them, but Margaret told me they all refused; to be sure they have not much use for money here, and I suppose he will not converse with them for fear of betraying his gipsy origin, for I understand he is very proud or very shy, and he will never eat with them, but always dines in Mr. Rayland's dressing-room. Now all this seems very strange, and that he should have plenty of money,—I never heard that gipsies were so rich."

"Well, I do think this is very strange," said Mrs. Weston, "and I have been told something of it before, and about his not eating with the

servants; and I thought perhaps it was as well, because then he could form no acquaintance with them afterwards."

"I fear," said Rayland, "I have brought some trouble into the family——"

"Indeed," interrupted Laura, "you have only brought amusement; all these things are so new, and so uncommon, that I declare it is quite delightful. More events have occurred in the last month, than in the twelve preceding years, and no doubt, Mr. Rayland, you know how pleasant novelty is,—though, to us, novelty is really so;—a change of season, or from rain to sunshine, has been the only alteration in our routine of time."

"I would the same fate might be laid on Astol for the next fifty years!"

"Why that would include nearly all our lives, supposing we reach the age of man."

"It would, indeed, Miss Penruddock; but yet I wish it might so continue."

"Leave me out, I pray," said Mrs. Weston,

laughing, "leave me out of your arrangement, or, let me see, I should be—fifty, and no matter what,—but it would be over a hundred. I shall be quite ready to go before then, I hope."

"I question if I shall," observed Walter, "that is, from here, I mean. I believe I do not quite know what I do mean."

"Nor I," thought Weston; "but it is getting late, and I suppose we are getting sleepy."

CHAPTER XV.

Kaied his name, though rumour said he bore
 Another, ere he left his mountain shore ;
 For sometimes he would hear, however nigh,
 That name repeated loud, without reply,
 As unfamiliar.

" I HAVE often wondered what strange whim brought you to Astol, Mr. Rayland," said Lucy, one evening, when they were employed with their usual occupation, and Walter was sketching caricatures of fashionable life ; in his present mood, and with the inhabitants of the Manor House before him, all the haunts of fashion were only fit subjects for caricature.

" It was a providential whim for us, if it merits that term," observed Laura, " and one for which we must ever be grateful."

" True," returned Lucy ; " but still, if it is no secret, I should like to know what tempted you, or rather what influenced you to erect

those tents, and take up your abode in our forest dell? You must have had some strong motive."

"A very strong one,—an influence that no created being can resist, all nature submits to its power,—the influence of yon bright orb, which is even now sinking in the west, casting so many brilliant hues on those gay clouds; did you ever see more beautiful colours, from the palest amber tinged with silver, to the deepest red blazoned with gold?"

"The sun!" exclaimed Walter's companions.
"How could the sun influence you?"

"By being too bountiful, that was all; you who have always had the shelter of those trees to screen you from its too potent rays, and the pure air of this flower-garden, can have no idea how insufferable and overpowering the mid-day sun is in the close and confined streets of London, without one stray zephyr to cool the throbbing brow;—if you had felt the intense heat that we were enduring last July, you would

not wonder that we were induced to change it for the shade of the forest."

"I can easily comprehend how unpleasant a large city must be in hot weather," said Mrs. Weston. "When I was a girl I went to visit some friend of my mother's at Southampton; it was very hot and disagreeable, one day was sufficient,—and I rejoiced to return home."

"As we did, when we pitched our tents."

"But had you no country relations to visit, when you wished to leave London, Sir?" asked Mrs. Weston. "Young gentlemen like you must have friends in the country."

"We are not badly off in that respect, but we wished to be more independent."

"And can you not be independent with your friends?" asked Lucy.

"Not so much as we desired."

"I fear then," said Laura, "you must feel under some restraint with us."

"Restraint here!" exclaimed Walter; "why this is the very dwelling of freedom!"

"In which you are a captive, Mr. Rayland," remarked Lucy.

"True, indeed," replied Walter, with something like a sigh.

"It will not be for long," observed Mrs. Weston, in a tone of commiseration, "your wound will soon be well enough for you to travel."

A general movement of the eyes followed this remark; Laura looked earnestly at Walter for one moment, and then resumed her work; Lucy placed hers on the table, as if she wanted eyes, as well as ears, to comprehend the reply Walter might think proper to give, if he gave any, to Mrs. Weston; while the good lady took off her spectacles and gazed at the wounded part, possibly wishing to penetrate through bandages, and judge of the length of time still necessary for a perfect cure. Walter received each glance in turn, and appeared to understand the secret thoughts of his companions; though it might have puzzled a disciple of Lavater to explain the meaning, that these silent glances caused

in his countenance, or to account for the deep glow that spread over his face. He did not speak, nor attempt to break the awkward pause that ensued, and which appeared to infect all, save Mrs. Weston, who when she had made a calculation in her mind of the time still requisite for Walter's stay at Astol, was the first to continue the discourse, saying,—“It must be irksome to a young gentleman like you, Sir, to be shut up with such poor company as we are: Miss Penruddock and Miss Moreton know very little of the world, only what they have seen here, and what they have heard from me, and I forget nearly all I knew when I was young. I often wish Mr. Penruddock would help us to amuse you, Mr. Rayland,—but, alas, he would be more at a loss than we are: however, it cannot be long before you will be able to move with safety; and if the gentlemen had not left their tents, you might have joined them now with ease.”

“Then you are tired of me, Mrs. Weston?”

"Tired of you?—oh no!—But you are tired of this still and quiet place; it was not always so: there have been times when you would have enjoyed being here, Mr. Rayland."

"Not more than I do now, my good Madam."

"You are very kind to say so; and gratitude will compel me to do my best to strengthen you, that you may return the sooner to your friends. Ah! it is sad to be away from home when we are ill; but take courage, it shall not be for long."

Again Laura looked up from her work, and she cast one glance at Walter, and as quickly resumed her employment. Lucy had removed from the time when she put her needle on the table; she now hastily caught it up, while a comical expression played round her mouth, which, however, appeared as closely guarded as if the signet of Solomon had been placed there. Whatever her ideas might be, they seemed to be understood by Walter;—a half-second he rested one moment on his features, which

quickly followed by an expression of gravity, if not pain.

"You are uneasy now, Mr. Rayland," said Mrs. Weston, looking at him with compassion.

"I am indeed," he returned, "but it is because I see you wish to get rid of me before I am well."

"Oh! dear Sir! do not think so. Do, Laura—do, Lucy, say something that Mr. Rayland may not think so badly of us."

Lucy appeared to make an effort to remove the embargo that seemed placed on her speech, and she abruptly said,—“Pray, Mr. Rayland, what did you think, when you saw Miss Penruddock in your tent, the night we so fortunately made your acquaintance?”

“I was perfectly astonished!—Nor could I think a mortal stood before me; we all thought——”

“The dell was haunted,” said Lucy, seeing he hesitated.

“We thought so, Lucy,” said Laura, “when we first observed Mr. Rayland with his friends;

and I am sure our astonishment was equal to any they might feel at my sudden appearance. Conceive our surprise when we beheld a young man in such strange attire, so different to your present dress! You will laugh at us supposing, when we heard you were gentlemen, that your costume was according to the fashion, and that the fashionable world were as green as yourselves."

Laura was interrupted by a laugh, which appeared to burst involuntarily from Walter's mouth, loud, and so long, that it caused a look of surprise from his companions.

"I said you would laugh at us," said Laura.

"I entreat pardon for my rudeness," said Penruddock; "I laughed at the ridiculous appearance we must have made,—you might think us green."

"Think you green! Was not that the colour of your dress?"

"You are a merry gentleman," said Weston, "and if I were not afraid of tiring

I would ask you to tell us something about fashionable life."

"You will not tire me, my good madam; I shall have much pleasure in answering any question you may wish to put."

"I don't know exactly what to ask; but can't you tell us something about London, and the court, and all that is going on there?"

"First inform us," said Laura, "why fashionable people, as you term them, are not independent?"

"Because they are bound by rules and opinions which have neither sense nor judgment in them."

"And why are they so bound?"

"You require more, Miss Penruddock, than I can answer. I can only repeat that fashion binds them in chains stronger than iron."

"Then they are slaves, indeed! But is there no escape?"

"They have no wish to escape—they willingly submit to slavish rules; a man of fashion has no desire, no will of his own;—he will not eat,

drink, or sleep, save at those hours that fastidiously dictates."

"And what are the favourite amusements of these submissive people?"

"One of them is riding or driving on a circular path in the Park, where they go round and round for hours, like—like what you see in the picture. Why, like the poor fawn that was caught in the rope in the park, poor thing!—it went round in a certain space, like the drive in Hyde Park, or else they ride backwards and forwards on a dusty road, where each horse kicks up sufficient dust to suffocate his neighbour."

"Is that their only place for exercise?"

"It is the only place for persons of fashion."

"But," said Laura, "they have great amusements at the Theatres; I can fancy how delightful they must be,—and the Opera?"

"Fashionable people never visit the Theatres—it is vulgar. They frequent the Opera to see each other; sometimes they listen, and most of the time they notice the dancing."

"How do they employ the morning?"

"In running from one house to another,—and in the evening the same."

"In the morning, I suppose, you mean they make what you call morning visits,—but not in the evening?"

"They drive from one party to another, the same as in the morning they drove from one house to another."

"The parties must be delightful," observed Lucy, "if we may judge by the description Madam Weston gives of those she witnessed in her youth."

"I have thought them so," replied Walter, "but every pleasure fades when the novelty ceases; and now I detest the crowded rooms, where you are either poked up in a corner, or obliged to elbow your way, to the annoyance of dowagers, and the destruction of gauze and lace."

"Those must be trifling inconveniences, compared to the delightful conversation and the enjoyment of select society," said Laura.

"The delightful conversation consists of—

‘Very full to-night.’—‘Going to the Duchess’s?’—‘How long shall you stay here?’—‘Intend dancing? oh, dreadful in such a crowd! shockingly hot!’—‘Just come from Lady ——’s, —horribly thin there—rooms empty—thought I should catch my death—makes me shiver now—Pretty girl that, who is she? oh! I see, Lady T.’s daughter—won’t do, no money—Look at that girl, she’s a hundred and fifty thousand; isn’t she an angel?—oh! never mind a cast in the eye, the gold hides all that—Temper! what has temper to do with a fortune like her’s?—What time will they sup?—sha’n’t stay here, though—they give better suppers at Mrs. B.’s—always choose the best place for supper—go there last—must make my bow here or I shall be too late for Mrs. B.—good night—better come with me.’ This is very delightful and refined conversation, Miss Penruddock.”

“Very, indeed,” replied Laura, laughing, “and no doubt very correctly given, with a little embellishment.”

"No, indeed; I wish to give you a good opinion of London fashionables, so I have said the best I can."

"We must not employ you, Mr. Rayland, when we desire a favourable impression to be given of us. Your description of our ignorance would be as amusing to your gay friends as your account of fashionable manners is to us."

Walter made no reply, and Laura continued, "Does this gay life continue the same all the year?"

"Not exactly. In the country they are more rational in the size of their parties; they still give them."

"Do they never pass an evening as we do now, Mr. Rayland?" asked Mrs. Weston.

"Not very often; but some sensible people do."

"When you return to the world," said Lucy, "you will enjoy the amusements you have been describing, and enter with more delight into the parties of gaiety after your seclusion here."

"Never!" said Walter, with a determination that almost startled his companions; "Never," he repeated, "will I give up my time, my strength, and my comfort, for the privilege of being termed one of the *élite*. I would rather," continued, laughing, "turn gipsy at once, and range this forest for ever. Will you intercede with your father, Miss Penruddock, to make one of his rangers?"

"You need not require my aid: we are bound by gratitude to employ you, when your own means fail."

"And now, my dear Mrs. Weston," said Walter, "will you tell us more of those by-gone times, when this ancient building was the seat of the gay and gallant?"

"I cannot speak of them as you do, Sir. I cannot laugh at those who were the friends of Mr. Penruddock."

"I dare say there was nothing you could not laugh at," said Walter, "but I will not quiz. They were a different race from those of the present day."

"I'm sure they must have been, Mr. Rayland, for they never spoke in that flippant, quick way that you did, when you described your London life; there seems to me as much difference as there is in the dance you told us of the other night, and our minuets.—Ladies and gentlemen never crowded, and Madam Everard would have been shocked, indeed, if any of her guests had been poked up in a corner all night. As for riding round and round, like a horse in a mill, my lady could not have borne that, nor wasting all her time in visiting."

"She lived a very different life, no doubt, Mrs. Weston. The Lady Bountiful of the place, of course?"

"My lady was Mrs. Penruddock, Mr. Rayland, and a better lady never lived than Madam Everard."

"My good Mrs. Weston, don't speak so reproachfully. Believe me, I shall never question the worth of one whom you praise; and so I

intended when I called her 'my Lady Bountiful.' In my opinion there cannot be a more estimable or a more delightful character than a lady who resides among her own people, and makes their happiness and comfort her study;—it is impossible to honour such a person too highly; so be not angry with me for having a flippant tongue—blame dame Nature, rather."

"I am not angry," said the good-natured old lady, "but I thought you were going to 'quiz,' as you called it just now."

"Not one of Astol! But go on, my dear madam, and tell us some more of Mrs. Penruddock, who must indeed have been worthy, for your attachment to last so long."

"I was born in the family, and allowed to play with 'Squire Everard when he was a little boy, before he had a tutor; and I had the care of the present 'Squire, Mr. Penruddock, and they always treated me as one of the family. Then ought I not to love them as if they were my own?—and they are my own. But there, do

not all look so grave, as if you were going to cry, and I will tell you how my lady used to pass her time. After prayers in the chapel my lady breakfasted; then she consulted with the housekeeper, and visited the poor people, comforting all wherever she went; and then she used to pay visits with six horses, when it was any grand visit——”

“Six horses, in this forest!” exclaimed Rayland. “Why how could they ever find their way? A broad-wheeled waggon brought our tents with the greatest difficulty.”

“Oh! but the roads were very different then,” replied Mrs. Weston.

“And how did they get in their present form, for no sign of a road is now discernible? They must have been purposely destroyed, Mrs. Weston, and for what purpose, do you know?”

But Mrs. Weston knew nothing; a sudden change came over her loquacity, and Rayland could gain no further information; the old lady would not return to the subject, she would

peak on any point but what related to Manor House. At length she insisted it was bed-time, and they must all retire; Raylton protested, and the young ladies exclaimed against the early hour; but Mrs. Weston was peremptory, a most unusual thing with her, and they were obliged to submit. When Walter reached his sleeping-room he rung for his attendant;—the boy was not in the house. He soon, however, returned, and Walter, whose curiosity was excited by the change in Mrs. Weston's manner, when they were speaking to Mrs. Penruddock, told him to sit, it was early to go to bed. The boy never at any time hesitated at taking a chair, nor was he ever backward in conversation, when Walter felt inclined to converse; on this occasion Raylton commenced at once by asking him if he had made any acquaintance among the servants? He had not;—"The servants," he said, "were steady persons, who never appeared to have time for gossiping."

"Have you attempted to make friends with them?"

"Yes, Sir, I have."

"In what way? You do not appear sociably inclined towards them; you never join their meals."

"I never shall, Sir; nor do I believe they wish it."

"You are very independent, which is not to be wondered at, considering you are a forester. My curiosity is much excited; you have some powerful motive for wishing to remain here, you do not attempt to deny that; and yet, it seems as if your only earthly purpose was how to entertain me."

"If I have succeeded it will give me much satisfaction."

"You may be satisfied then, for I have great amusement in endeavouring to discover your real intent, but I am still wide of the mark; and I suppose I should only give you the trouble of inventing replies, if I were to make inquiry re-

specting the inhabitants of this dwelling. I will not put your veracity to the proof."

"You may"—said the boy, with a voice and manner so haughty and dignified, that Walter looked at him with astonishment,—“you may ask what you please, Sir; I do not say I will answer, but I will not say what is untrue.”

“I believe you,” said Walter, with fervency, “and I will not question you.”

“There has occurred nothing since I have been here that I may not freely mention; so, if it will give you pleasure, I have no objection to reply.”

“In that case I shall be glad to converse a little about this strange place, for such it certainly is. Did you ever hear the servants say why their master lived in such retirement?”

“Never. But I heard in the forest that his seclusion was occasioned by the death of his wife.”

“Have you heard those persons speak as knowing her personally?”

"Never."

"Nor have you made any inquiry among the domestics?"

"I have; but I could gain no satisfactory information."

"Had you any particular reason for asking?"

"I cannot answer that question."

"Indeed! And why not?"

The boy smiled. "I told you I had my secret."

"True. Has the motive been answered for which you wished to visit this place?"

"It has not, yet."

"Yet,—do you expect it will?"

"I hope so."

"And if you do succeed, may you then impart your secret?"

"That is more than I can tell."

"You are a very mysterious personage."

The boy appeared not to notice this observation; Walter continued—"Do you not consider yourself as being very strange and unaccountable?"

" I do, indeed."

" Have you seen much of this house and the grounds?"

" Yes, Sir. I have been nearly over the house, except those rooms that are occupied by Mr. Penruddock and the family."

" And the grounds?"

" Yes,—near the house; but I have not been able to go far, for fear you should require assistance while I was absent."

" I am certainly much obliged to you for your care and kindness, particularly when you have some cause for your visit, which would leave you from me."

" They are more than repaid by procuring me admission here; and I hope," said the boy, fervently, " I may have an opportunity of requiting the obligation."

" Do you consider the introduction of such a moment?"

" Of the greatest."

" And yet, as respects your particular motive, you are no wiser than when you entered?"

"I am not."

"Nor am I," said Walter, laughing, "though you do answer my queries with so much apparent openness and candour; I should never do for a barrister, that's certain, I should cut a poor figure at a cross examination."

"You need not infer that, from your present essay; you have received all the information I can give; no one can extract wisdom from ignorance."

"Ignorance would be strangely misapplied, if applied to you, in every sense. I should fear to enter the list in opposition, though you profess a vagrant life, and I have been more than the usual time at our famous Oxford."

Walter spoke his sentiments respecting his attendant. He was well informed, and must have received the most liberal education. Walter could not conceal from himself that in classic lore this unknown was his superior, and in modern accomplishments his equal. "This boy's history must be worth knowing," said

Walter to himself. "Such a strong desire for admission here—I trust it is for no ill—I would not willingly be made a 'cat's paw' by a boy, a gipsy,—he had sense enough to know he could not keep up that farce,—the very idea is ridiculous, as if such manners and address could be acquired among vagrants and strollers! This young gentleman has been accustomed to high life:—he has the eyes of the Egyptian race, certainly, and the complexion, but a walnut will give that tinge. Well, after all, I wish he may turn out no worse, and I wish he had not been introduced by me."

Walter might well say the boy was mysterious, so young, apparently so candid, and yet so close; he gave the impression of being all openness and sincerity, and yet no clue was elicited to explain the contrast of his obvious situation; a vagrant, promoted to the responsibility of a gentleman's attendant, with the manner, feeling, and education of one who had evidently moved in good society, if not in the highest circles."

"Pray," said Walter, as he was preparing to retire, "have you always resided in the New Forest? you said you were born here. I am not putting what counsel call a leading question, and I know you will not answer without it may please you, so, on that point, I need not be debarred by delicacy;—have you ever been far from the dell where your sylvan home is situated?"

"I have been in London," replied the boy.

"Were you there long?"

"I don't exactly remember,—but somewhere about three years."

"May I ask with whom you resided, and where?"

"I do not know that I should be wrong if I satisfied your curiosity in that respect; but not being certain, I would rather decline an answer."

"Satisfy my curiosity!—upon my word,"—thought Walter, for he was now getting a little piqued, "this young gentleman assumes a high

tone, he seems to forget he has chosen to consider me his master; in that case I had better ask no more questions; it is not quite agreeable to be reproved by one whom we are told is our servant,—a mere boy too in age, though a man in talent and decision. I must keep up my dignity if possible, and the best way to do so at present is to ask no further, but ‘satisfy my curiosity’ in sleep.” Walter followed his own advice, and was soon in profound repose.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Some strange commotion
Is in his brain ; he bites his lip and starts ;
Stops on a sudden, looks upon the ground ;
Then lays his finger on his temples.——"

ANOTHER week passed at Astol Manor House :
—Walter Rayland was now able to walk on the
lawn before the summer-parlour, and he began
to fear he should soon have no excuse for re-
maining the guest of Mr. Penruddock ; every
day removed the paleness from his cheek, and
gave fresh strength to his wounded limb.

"It was horridly provoking !" but he must,
ere long, acknowledge himself quite well. Mr.
Smithson had pronounced him so,—taken his
formal leave ; but then, Walter had not much
difficulty in persuading himself that it was
a great inconvenience for Mr. Smithson to
come so far, over such wild forest land, and
where, as he often declared, he had never been

before. It was very natural that he should, with his large practice, to be relieve a troublesome a patient; but that was why his honoured father and mother, nothing of sister and friends, should misery of losing him, by too early. Walter was very willing to be influenced by the ladies of Astol; and he listened with complacency to the arguments adduced in his voluntary attendant, to prove he would incur no risk if he ventured to encounter the roads of the forest.

"It's all very true," said Walter, to his own statement of facts, "it is true, I might be laid up again for months, perhaps, not here, but in that vile country—no, no,—Walter Rayland, be wise and do not leave Paradise while Paradise is open to you; perhaps in a few short years after my departure its master may be in your acquaintance, as, I understand, he did when he was intimate with some hundred years

All this was very well for a time, but Walter, with all his endeavours, and they were many, could not conceal from himself that he was well,—quite well,—and it was an infringement upon Mr. Penruddock's hospitality still to remain in the Manor House. But how was he to leave? To leave it as he entered was impossible:—his heart was irrecoverably gone! and he was quite ignorant if he might ever hope to have one given in return. Laura was kind, gentle, and obliging; but he could detect no symptom of partiality for him,—much to his discomfort. “Was he to be a love-lorn swain?—Forbid it every thing manly! He would never waste his time sighing at beauty's feet.” How we deceive ourselves!—he had done nothing else for the last month; eight weeks had he been an inhabitant in the mansion belonging to Laura's father, and there most willingly, most happily, could he remain for ever. But it must not be; he must arrange for his departure, and unwillingly did he commence his preparations, which

were finally hastened by a letter summoning him to attend his sister's union with Reginald Trevallian. There was no longer time for hesitation,—he must go, or write an excuse, that would bring father, mother, and all, down to nurse and comfort him,—a consummation not to be desired : so, because the case was imperative, he reluctantly mentioned to Mr. Penruddock, that finding himself sufficiently recovered to leave Astol, (which, by the bye, he had been for the last month,) he would, with many acknowledgments for the kindness and hospitality extended to him, depart for his paternal home, on the commencement of the next week.

Mr. Penruddock made no effort to induce Walter to alter his determination ; he repeated his expressions of gratitude for the assistance rendered by Rayland and his companions, and his hope of being hereafter able, in some measure, to return the obligation.

The day arrived for the departure of Walter. Many were the sighs heaved in secret by the

female inhabitants of Astol ; the presence of the animated, cheerful stranger had given a life and gaiety which the family at the Manor House found too delightful to relinquish without regret. It may be presumed that Mr. Penruddock had not experienced the same exhilaration, as he made no attempt to prevail on Walter to delay his departure, and he received his adieu as if they had been parting merely for a day.

Laura, with Lucy and Mrs. Weston, were assembled to bid farewell to their young friend, before he left their abode, most probably, for ever. The servant entered with the information that the horses were ready. After once more shaking hands with Mr. Penruddock, Walter was leaving the room, when the gipsy boy, who had been some time present, whispered in his ear ; apparently the communication was displeasing, for he frowned and shook his head ; the boy, however, persisted, and even went so far as to hold Walter by the arm. Walter at length seemed out of patience, and turned to

the master of the mansion, saying—"This boy is quite troublesome: will you, Sir, have the kindness to hear what he has to say, and tell him, as I have, that his desire is unreasonable, and cannot be gratified."

"Excuse me," returned Mr. Penruddock, "I know too little of the affairs of the world to be able to interfere between a master and his servant."

The blood rushed to the face of the boy at this refusal, and then quickly vanished; while Walter replied, "It is a singular request;—he wishes to be allowed to continue under your hospitable roof, though I have assured him of a home with my family."

Mr. Penruddock made no remark nor observation, but remained evidently waiting for Walter to depart. Rayland perfectly understood that he conceived this was no concern of his. The boy, however, would not so readily give up the point, and, turning to Mr. Penruddock, he said, timidly, "I would endeavour, Sir, to make my-

self useful." The person addressed looked as if he scarcely comprehended his meaning, when Laura, feeling some compassion for the ardent wish of the poor boy, interposed, and taking her father's hand, she said, "There is plenty of room at Astol, and I dare say Weston could find employment for this young man."

"Employment! What do you mean, Laura?"

"Mr. Rayland's attendant, papa; he wishes to remain here; he was born in our forest, and I dare say does not like the thought of living in a town."

"Do you mean," said Mr. Penruddock, in his usual quiet and abstracted manner, "that you wish this young man to continue at Astol, to stay here as our companion?"

"No, papa, not exactly as our companion."

"What then, my dear Laura? we have no occasion for an increase in our domestic establishment."

Walter here interposed:—"We will not trespass on your time, my dear Sir; you have

already been too kind, too hospitable
shall long remember the happy days I
Astol."

"Happy days at Astol!" repeated Penruddock, with an involuntary shudder, "remember there were such." It was to witness the anguish portrayed on his face, as unconsciously he echoed the words of his guest; then recollecting himself, he said, "I wish you good morning, and a pleasant journey, Mr. Rayland." As he spoke he was moving towards the door, but he was too intent on his purpose to be thus restrained, and looking in a beseeching manner at Penruddock, he said in low, but in strong and impressive accents,—“Allow me to say a few words, Sir; do not deny, I entreat you, that my happiness or misery of my life may depend on your decision. I will not long claim your attention, and if you then refuse me I will be obliged to submit, and leave Astol with Mr. Rayland; but first hear me, Sir, only one moment private."

Mr. Penruddock appeared much struck by the manner of the boy: he gazed long and earnestly at him without taking any notice of his request. The lad remained perfectly silent, as if willing to allow the master of the house full time for observation; this observation was not quickly ended, for Laura remarked in a low voice to Lucy, that "one would imagine her father had never seen the boy before."

"Probably he never has," returned Lucy, "Mr. Penruddock is too absent to observe all that takes place before his eyes, and I dare say he never has noticed this boy, who, however, has not been much in his way."

Lucy spoke in a low tone, still it was sufficiently loud to awaken Mr. Penruddock from his reverie; sighing deeply he said—

"What do you wish, young man? If it is to remain at Astol, I am sorry I must refuse."

"My present desire is that you will hear me say a few words in private."

"You can have nothing to communicate

which will have the effect of altering my determination, therefore it would be useless to occupy the time of either. You may apply to Mr. Groves, if money——”

“ Oh, no !” replied the lad, with vehemence, “ it is not that.” He hesitated, and for a moment seemed bewildered ; and then, putting his hand in his vest, with apparent reluctance, he drew forth a sealed paper, or letter, which he placed in Mr. Penruddock’s hand, saying,—
“ If you will not hear me, Sir, at least look at this.”

Laura was attentively noticing what passed between her father and their strange companion. She scarcely expected he would read the paper ; to her surprise he did, and, to her still greater surprise, after he had perused a few lines, his countenance changed, a deadly paleness overspread his face, and, sinking on a chair, he remained in a state of extreme agitation. Laura was hastening to him, but he motioned her away ; for a short space he seemed incapable of

speaking, when at length he recovered sufficiently, he said—

“Laura, my dear, oblige me by leaving the room for a few minutes; Mr. Rayland will accompany you. I wish to be alone with this young man.”

When Laura and her companions left Mr. Penruddock with the gipsy lad, they went to the summer-parlour; all were too much occupied with what had just occurred, to be able to speak on any other subject.

“Altogether,” said Lucy, “this has been a most extraordinary circumstance, and this is a most extraordinary young gentleman; for nobody will ever make me believe his own nonsensical tale of being a real gipsy, and no doubt, Mr. Rayland, you are of the same opinion.”

“You have always got some whimsey in your head, Lucy,” returned Mrs. Weston; “not but what in this case I do not think you are so far wrong, in respect of his not being a gipsy; but

I will answer for it you are wrong in what else you may imagine."

"No, that I cannot, for I can imagine no other way it is all too wonderful for my poor brain. The only prophecy that this young man, or rather, it is ridiculous to call him a man or boy, he will remain here, you will see, and turn out to be some great man."

"Like the heroes in some of the old romances in the Library, eh, Miss Moreton?"

"I think it very probable, Mr. Rayland. I do believe you know all about and concerning him."

"You wrong me now, indeed; whatever I may have to answer for, this is not my number. Still I agree with you that there is something strange, 'passing strange,' about this boy; and as to being a gipsy, he is more one than I am. But, on my honour, I never saw nor heard of him till the night he was so unexpectedly introduced to you and the rest of this kind family. But this boy ce

came to our camp with the hope of gaining admittance; this he has acknowledged to me since, and I mentioned the fact to Mr. Penruddock."

"Merciful heavens!" interrupted Lucy, "perhaps he belongs to the thieves, the robbers who broke into the house; and now you are going, Mr. Rayland, they will make another attempt!"

"I wish, Miss Moreton, you could persuade Mr. Penruddock to adopt this opinion, and to keep me as a guard; I dare say you are correct in your idea," said Walter, laughing. "What do you think on this subject, Miss Penruddock? I hope you will use your interest to have me kept as sentinel."

But Laura was too deeply occupied with the remembrance of the agitation exhibited by her father, to be able to join in the light conversation which was continued by Rayland and Lucy, till a message came from Mr. Penruddock, with an intimation that the horses were ready, and Mr. Penruddock requested to speak with Mr.

Rayland before he left the Manor House. more Rayland repeated his farewells, and departed.

"The young gentleman has not succeeded," observed Lucy, "when Walter had his apartment."

"Why do you think so?" asked Mrs. W.

"Because Brenner said the horses were not wanted, if only one had been wanted, he would of course have said the horse."

"That does not follow. Brenner knew nothing of what had happened; and, besides, I am sure Mr. Barwell is to act as guide. But I hope you are right, Lucy; it would not be very pleasant to have a wild gipsy lad here to torment us day and night."

"That does not follow, either, Madam," said Mr. W. "He may amuse us all day perhaps, but he will not require his entertaining power long. He will depend on it he is clever, or he would never have succeeded so well as he has in maintaining his post. I wish, though, he was some

older; he is too young, even to talk nonsense."

"Never fear, Lucy, he may soon learn that of you. But hark! I heard the drawing-room door shut—they are gone."

"So they are," said Lucy, "I hear the tread of horses. Upon my word there they go, and the boy is not with them; there I see them,—look Laura,—there is Mr. Rayland and Reuben Barwell,—but not Mr. Gipsy! Well, this is wonderful! this beats all I ever heard or saw. I declare I'd give my little finger to know the beginning and end of it."

"I know what the end will be if you speak so loud on this subject—Mr. Penruddock will be seriously displeased, and that, Lucy, will end your wonder."

"So it will, indeed," thought Lucy, "and I must keep my astonishment till we are in some quiet secure corner. Upon my word I shall fear to think soon, in this strange mansion; lately we have had nothing but wonders!"

a temporary respite; the dinner-bell
at the usual time, and when the young
proceeded to the drawing-room, Mr.
dock was, contrary to his daily custom,
before them; and Lucy, though she had
course of the morning decided never to
again, as her curiosity was not to be
was more than ever bewildered, when
the very identical gipsy boy seated on
and apparently occupied with some print

The boy rose when Laura and her com
entered the room; the movement seeme
call Mr. Penruddock from some deep
plation on the beauty of the prospect
from the window: a stranger would ha
gined this to be the subject of his med
but Laura was perfectly well aware t
father was solely engrossed by his own th

"This young gentleman, my dear Laura, will be our guest for some time; you will give direction to Weston respecting his accommodation, as the friend of your father."

It was perfectly impossible for Laura to make any reply, if her father had required it—fortunately he did not; turning to the boy, he said, "You will lead Miss Penruddock to the dining-room." Then bowing to Lucy who, though she had prophesied all this, was yet so overcome with astonishment, that she was scarcely able to follow Laura and the strange boy. Mr. Penruddock never offered her his arm; it was the general habit for him to join the ladies at the dinner-table, and if Walter Rayland had not by his presence introduced some of the observances of the world, Laura might have been puzzled to understand what the boy meant by offering her his arm. Sir Charles Grandison, who was Weston's oracle, and standard of good behaviour, always handed the ladies at arm's length; all the prints represented him in that style, and so

Laura expected the gentlemen of the day to conduct a lady. As for Lucy, perplexity absolutely spoiled her dinner, morsel could she eat, it was of little consequence, no one appeared to have any and all being in the same way, why then no entreaty, no observation, plates were and taken away nearly in the same conversation was no better off, not a word spoken; at length the table was cleared, dessert placed, and the servants retired.

"What next, I wonder!" thought Lucy. "We are to sit here like dummies? We are not eloquacious before Mr. Penruddock, but we do say something; however, I shall endeavour to begin. If my life were to depend on it, I should not be able to speak on any subject but the one I ought not!"—and Lucy "Patience on a monument," sighing, waited for love, but explanation. There was a little congratulation in Lucy's resignation; she had prophesied all this, but it was by chance

Mr. ——" but no farther could he get; he cast one look at the boy, as if to say—what shall I call you? The boy seemingly understood the appeal; he bowed gracefully to Laura as he said—"Evelyn."

"Mr. Evelyn," repeated Mr. Penruddock. Laura addressed him by the appellation, and silence again ensued till the ladies left the apartment.

Laura was proceeding to the sea turret that she might muse on these surprising events at leisure; but Lucy placed her arm within her friend's, and led the way to Mrs. Weston's room. Lucy did contrive to contain her astonishment till she had closed the door, and made Laura take a chair beside Mrs. Weston; and then placing herself on a foot-stool, she gave way to all the marvels and mysteries by which she was overpowered.

"Oh, Madame Weston!—What do you think? Of all the strange things that ever happened to man, woman, or child, this is the strangest, the

most wonderful! Well, Miss Laura Penruddock, what do you think of all this?"

"Why, indeed, Miss Lucy Moreton, I am almost as much surprised as you are."

"And well you may be! I'm sure it cost me my dinner, and I don't believe any of the party had much to do with their knives and forks; the cook may send up the same dishes to-morrow, for the damage we did them. Oh, Astol! thy wonders will never cease."

"Nor your tongue either, Lucy," said Mrs. Weston. "But what is all this wonder about?"

"About the gipsy boy—a vagrant—a camp-stroller—being invited to dine with the heiress of Astol Manor! What think you of that, Madam Weston? Mr. Penruddock must not be surprised if other thoughts should come in his head."

"Mercy, how you run on! Do say what all this is about?"

"About Mr. Evelyn, the attendant of Mr. Rayland, and the friend of Mr. Penruddock."

and the companion of Miss Penrud say nothing of Miss Moreton."

"Do be serious, Lucy, and explain what you mean."

"I am serious enough; but to explain is rather a grave concern, and more than I can undertake; you must apply to Laura, who is not quite so wonder-struck as I am."

"Then, my dear Laura, what is all this?"

"Indeed, dear Weston, I do not know what my father says, this young boy——"

"Young gentleman," interposed Laura.

"This young gentleman, then, is a stranger to us, and he is to be our guest for some time; his name is Evelyn, and this is all I know."

"And all I know too," sighed Lucy. "I wish you had told me this before, dear Madame Weston."

"I could not have helped you, Lucy."

"Oh, yes, you could. And I cannot stand why you do not dine with us; I have heard Laura say her father wished it."

"Cannot you understand why? The daughter of his father's steward to set at table with her master! Oh, no, Lucy, I could never think of such a thing."

"Then what must you think of me? I am supported by Mr. Penruddock's charity, and have no more right, by birth, than you have."

"It is all habit, my dear, you were brought up to it; you were not taught in your childhood to think Mr. Penruddock's family the first in the world."

"I don't know what I have been taught," said Lucy, with great feeling; "but I am sure I have every reason to consider it the first—the dearest."

"Yes, very true, you have; but you have never seen them as I have. Oh, my Lady Cecilia, your great grandmother, Miss Laura, would walk out of her grave, if I were so to forget myself."

"Was she so proud?" inquired Laura.

"Only proper pride, Miss Penruddock. She

was of a high family; her father was the first duke in the kingdom, as every body knew; but she was a good and kind lady, and every body loved her, but every body respected much in awe of Lady Cecilia."

"But she has been dead so very long, and Mr. Rayland, you could sit and look at him."

"Lucy, when you come to my age, you will understand my feelings: I could sit down and make free with the Prince of Wales, with King George, sooner than I could with Penruddock; and yet, there is no earthly person I love so well, not even his daughter; she is the next thought, and after her I believe I should love Lucy."

"I am glad you include poor me in your list of loves, Weston; but this has taken from the gipsy boy,—I beg his pardon, Evelyn, I mean,—Master Evelyn was more in character with his appearance."

Lucy now recounted the particulars

had occurred at dinner, to Mrs. Weston, whose astonishment was almost equal to Lucy's, but she prudently forbore to express her wonder in the same way as her young companion; and reminding Lucy that Mr. Penruddock's wishes must be all attended to and obeyed, she advised her to forget she had ever seen the young gentleman in any other situation than the one he now occupied.

"If that were possible," said Lucy, "I would most gladly.—I don't know that I would, either;—there is something very amusing in a mystery, particularly here, where we go on one day so like another, that if it were not for Sundays, when we all assemble in the chapel, we should never know the ending of the week from the commencement;—a long sermon does lie on the memory."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Lucy, for sometimes you open your mouth very like a yawn, as if you were quite tired before the sermon was half over."

"You need not laugh, Laura, I have seen you keep me company."

"That is your fault, Lucy, every person knows the complaint is contagious."

"Infectious," said Lucy, gravely. "I learned that out of Weston's Notable Guide, where it says—'Love is an infectious disorder, given by looking at particular individuals, more especially if they chance to be good-looking or handsome.' A yawn, or gape, has the same explanation."

PENRUDDOCK,

A TALE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF 'WALTZBURG.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
WHITTAKER & CO., AVE MARIA-LANE.
1835.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES,
Duke Street, Lambeth.

PENRUDDOCK.

CHAPTER I.

Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcerned
The cheerful haunts of man, to wield the axe
And drive the wedge in yonder forest drear—
From morn to eve his solitary task.

THE day was far advanced when Walter Rayland passed through the park lodge on his return to the seat of his ancestors, which was situated in an inland county, far from the spot now so dear to him. The feelings of young lovers are proverbially trite,—tiresome to relate and wearisome to hear,—else chapters might be filled detailing the querulous regrets of our forest hero, with the half ludicrous, half pathetic reflections that dwelt on his mind, at the idea that he had taken leave of Laura Penruddock perhaps for ever. He might never again be

permitted to visit the antique abode of all that was lovely—all that was worth living for. Walter was in the mood to be displeased, and when he arrived at the spot where the gipsy camp had so lately been the scene of mirth and revelry, he was inclined to quarrel with the whole proceeding.

“This spot looks very different, Sir,” said Reuben Barwell, who had hitherto ridden silently by his side—“This is not such a gay place as it was two months ago.”

“It was a foolish, mad scheme,” returned Walter, in rather an abrupt manner, so different from his usual gay and open bearing, that Reuben checked his horse, which, however, was only walking, the rough road not permitting quicker travelling, and said—

“You are not well, I fear, Mr. Rayland; will you alight and rest?”

“I am quite well, I thank you; I was only thinking what fools we were to encounter every species of out-of-door inconvenience for a whim.

You must have thought us regular numskulls, Mr. Barwell."

"For leaving a large dirty, over-grown city, to inhabit the green wood? Oh, no! indeed; if all were of my mind, our forest dells would lose half their charm by being too thickly inhabited."

"You do not quarrel, then, with Mr. Penruddock's love of solitude?"

"No, truly; but I was born a forester, and when I was sent a boy to Winchester, how I used to sigh for my father's house, with its free air and liberty!"

"You are a Winchester scholar, then?"

"A Winchester schoolboy—I will not say much about the scholar: profound study was unnecessary for one intending to live by toil and farming; a tiller of the ground has little need of Greek or Latin."

"Were you always designed for a farmer?"

"Always. The Grange has been tenanted by the Barwells nearly as many centuries as the

Manor House has been in the possession of the Penruddocks; I wish no higher lot, and if you feel our rough riding fatiguing, and will rest this night at the Grange, you will see it is no despicable one."

Rayland hesitated a few moments, and then accepted the offer. It would not be amiss to make friends with the young man and his family; he might hereafter profit by the intimacy, if Mr. Penruddock should object to allow his visits at the Manor House. It could do no harm: the young man was gentlemanly and well educated; he should not be ashamed to acknowledge him in a London circle, and that was saying a great deal for Walter Rayland, who till lately was not only aristocratical, but fastidious, as to his companions; but love works miracles,—Reuben Barwell could talk of Laura Penruddock, could see her, and might, perhaps, be able and willing to send him information respecting what was passing at Astol.

As they picked their way, Reuben pointed out

the beauties of the forest; not a tree but he could tell its age, and many were the legends he recounted as believed by the foresters, wild and wonderful as they were interesting: to Walter they were particularly so; he ever delighted in tales of mystery, more, his sister would tell him, "than became one of the superior sex." Reuben's narrations, in fact, occupied too much attention, as they prevented Rayland from taking sufficient care in the broken and rugged brakes of the forest: twice his horse stumbled, and Walter observed it was fortunate for him that Reuben had extended his hospitality, as the evening was drawing in—they had loitered on their road most amazingly. "But are you sure it will be convenient to give me a bed at the Grange?" said he, suddenly stopping his horse, while waiting for Reuben's answer.

"Certainly,—as you have been an inmate of the Manor House,—else I should not have ventured to offer you accommodation."

“And why should that circumstance befriend me in the present instance?”

Reuben hesitated, as if debating whether or not to answer, and Walter continued, “The landlord has no authority over the domestic concerns of his tenants.”

“It is not usually the case, Sir, but we are peculiarly situated. As you have been so long at Astol, you can scarcely be termed a stranger, therefore I may speak more openly on this subject than I have ever done before. As I mentioned when we first left the park, my father’s ancestors have been almost as long tenants, as the Penruddocks have been landlords in this part of the world, and I believe my father takes as much interest in the prosperity of the family as if it were his own; Mr. Penruddock’s slightest wish has ever been law at the Grange. When Mr. Penruddock, on the death of his lady, formed the resolution of renouncing the world, and avoiding all communication with those neighbours with whom he had hitherto been

intimate, he explained to my father his intention of destroying the roads, and removing the cottages to some distant part of the estate; my father willingly and readily entered into his feelings, and agreed to all he proposed: from that day to this, Mr. Penruddock would never receive any rent for the Grange: when my father proffered it, he was told by Mr. Groves that his landlord thought a compliance with his whims was sufficient rent, and he would neither require nor take any other; consequently we have never once had a stranger in our dwelling from that time, nor have the doors of Astol been opened for a visiter till your assistance was of such material benefit to the family."

"I am almost sorry I consented to your invitation; your father may be displeased, but it is not too late——"

"I trust you will be welcome; for you were so long at the Manor House taking leave, after the horses were at the door, that it will soon be dark, and really I think it scarcely safe to ven-

ture any way but on foot—to that you are not equal.”

“ I fear you are right, and I must intrude.”

“ I cannot think it will be an intrusion, as you have been Mr. Penruddock’s visiter, and my father is hospitality itself.”

“ How can you speak so certainly on that point, seeing you do not admit strangers?”

“ We have another farm twelve miles distant, which belongs to my father, and there we receive our friends and relations when occasion serves.”

“ Well, then, if I am not intruding, I really shall be glad to rest, for though you say the space between the Manor House and the Grange is only two miles, yet verily the ground is so rough and uneven, such ups and downs, that I feel more tired than I have sometimes been with a chase of a hundred.”

“ Your loss of blood will account for that.”

“ I suppose it will. But is yonder light from your father’s house?”

it is, and we shall soon be there. Mind
runk,—and that pit,—now through this
; from here our path is tolerably straight.”
ough the evening was drawing in, it was
efficiently light to distinguish objects, and
r Rayland was rather surprised, instead
olding, as he expected, a good substantial
house, to find the Grange was a large
on, not of such an extent as the Manor
e, but perfectly capable of accommodating
e auctioneers would say) a family of dis-
on: an avenue of oaks led up to the front
nce, which was a pair of huge iron gates,
g to a garden or court, with the arms of
enruddocks in the centre of each half; the
buttresses that supported the gates were
unted by a stag, the crest of the family.
gh these ornamented doors you passed
large square lawn or grass plot with a
t border of flowers running under the
all, which surrounded three sides of the
the building formed the fourth side. A

large and ornamented porch projected from the dwelling, containing benches, carved with grotesque figures, and capable of accommodating six persons on each side ; the clematis, jasmine, and China rose, still scented the air with their fragrance, and every flower that flourished in any part of England appeared to have found its kindred soil, both at Astol and the Grange. Though books, prints, and novelties, (or, as many would think, necessities,) were forbidden, yet flowers were allowed to be introduced and fostered with the utmost care.

The porch led into a spacious hall, the windows emblazoned with the heraldic bearings of the Penruddocks; and the roomy fire-place was decorated with antlers of every size and description; the chairs that furnished the hall were of such massive structure that each chair seemed a fixture, and appeared to contain sufficient wood to form half a dozen; the veins of the walnut-tree timber, of which they were constructed, would have raised the envy of a wood-fancier; tables

of the same beautiful material graced the apartment; while guns, fishing-rods, and other implements of rural sport, were in abundance, and piled in every corner.

As Walter crossed the hall, he expressed his wonder at not having observed the Grange in any of his walks, while he resided in the tents.

"I thought you had been this way, Sir; some gentlemen passed our house several times."

"My companions, I suppose, for in truth I was too listlessly inclined to move beyond a snail's pace from the tent, till the first of September, and then the little game there was lay the other side; this is the only way in which I can account for my ignorance respecting your dwelling."

As Rayland spoke, Reuben opened the door leading into a large and comfortable sitting room, well furnished in an old-fashioned style. A middle-aged, stout, ruddy-faced man was reclining in a capacious chair of the same material as those in the hall; he was neither asleep

nor awake, and started up on Reuben's entrance, evidently surprised at the appearance of a stranger: a female about the same age, or something younger, was sitting by the window, having laid down a book which the increasing twilight prevented her from reading. Reuben introduced Walter as the friend and guest of Mr. Penruddock, adding—"You have, father, how providentially this young gentleman was in the neighbourhood and near the House when it was attacked; Heaven knows what would have become of the family if we had not received immediate succour."

"Heaven bless you, Sir," said Mr. Penruddock, taking the hand of Walter, and giving it a very gentle press. "You have not lived long enough at Astol to know the value of those who were saved that night. Angry and vexed was I when I heard of your nonsensical camp, but with all reason to bless your whim. I am glad to see you, Sir, at the Grange, and this is the first time I have said so for the last twelve years,

long is it since Mrs. Penruddock died, and I never expected to welcome any one again at the Grange, but as Mr. Penruddock entertained you at the Manor House, he can have no objection to my doing the same at the farm; so sit down, Sir, and Mrs. Barwell will see what we can have for supper."

"We have not dined yet," said Reuben; "we left Astol before their dinner, and we have loitered most unreasonably by the way, admiring all the giants of the forest."

"Poor souls, you must be famished; but Elizabeth will soon order something."

It was not long before Rayland and Reuben Barwell were seated at a relishing dinner, or supper, for soon after Walter expressed a wish to retire.

Reuben conducted Walter across the hall. One of the doors opened into a smaller apartment, from whence the staircase led up to a gallery leading round the hall; passing along one side of the gallery they opened a door lead-

ing through a small turret chamber, and then into a large well-furnished apartment, with an immense high bed; the room was hung with tapestry, except in two portions of about three feet in width, which were panelled with wainscot, carved and polished; round the apartment there were several whole-length portraits of ladies and gentlemen in antique dresses; a blazing fire warmed the room, and a table placed before it was embellished with many of those luxuries which Walter had long termed necessities.

"This is, indeed, comfortable," exclaimed Walter; "you might well say yours was no despicable lot. This room is sufficient to tempt any one, let their station in life be ever so high; those portraits are your ancestors, I suppose?"

"They are principally the Penruddocks, but we have taken the liberty of placing some of our race among them. This worthy in a green hunting-jacket was my great-grandfather; and

this lady, looking so meek, with a linnet on her finger and a posy in her other hand, was his daughter and my grandmother.—Can I assist you, Sir?"

"No, I thank you, Mr. Barwell; you have assisted me sufficiently in procuring me this tempting-looking bed."

"Then good night, Sir."

"Good night, my friend," said Walter, shaking him by the hand; "you must call me when it is time to rise, for I think I shall never wake of myself, I feel so tired after this trifling exertion."

"Not very trifling exertion to one unaccustomed to such rough riding, and weak from illness; besides, our forest is not in this part merely uneven, it is something like what I have seen of fortifications, a combination of ditches. I have often wondered how you contrived to get your tents and luggage (of which you appeared to have a sufficient stock) conveyed to the spot where you pitched your camp."

"Money!—It is an old but very true proverb that 'money makes the mare go,' and we not only paid but worked ourselves; the last two miles, after having destroyed a cart or waggon, we carried our luggage on shoulders, and the men whom we hired pleasantly assured us we might take back our moveables how we could, for they would not undertake the job again for any sum; so we made up our minds to leave our goods and chattels for the benefit of the sylvan deities. But there was less difficulty in leaving than in venturing here: my companions had the assistance of the Astol tenants, who, my friends have written me word, were nothing loath to help their departure,—not very grateful, though—as we had done all we could to ingratiate ourselves with the inhabitants of those few huts which were at some distance from us, too far, I supposed, to have noticed us in any way; but let their motive be what it might, they gave all help when my comrades raised their tents.—But this is a weary road for you to visit the Manor House."

ere is a shorter path, but a horse could
low it. There is a tradition that this
e a convent, and the Manor House a
ery; the old tales of scandal go so far as
t of a subterranean communication be-
ne two dwellings."

must be a famous long one, but not more
a many others in various parts of the
Kingdom. If legends may be credited,
erforated hills and undermined rivers,
any of the fuss they make in these dege-
days. I suppose at that time they had
method of wandering in darkness and
with impunity. But I am keeping you
r rest; so good night, my kind host."

CHAPTER II.

Oh ! dear's the romaunt of the olden time,
For all was then strange, and bright, and new
And nought was certain, yet all seemed true ;
And truth was fable, and Fiction dressed
Her witching phantoms in Truth's own vest !

O, then, I see, Queen Mab hath been with yo

WALTER RAYLAND had experienced so much fatigue in the short journey from the House to the Grange, that he soon sought sound repose, which might have continued three hours, and possibly would have lasted till daybreak, if he had not been suddenly awakened by a light passing over his face. He started in his bed, exclaiming—"Is it time to rise ?" He was fast asleep ;" when, receiving no answer, he rubbed his eyes, and concluding he must obey the call, he made a sound half between a groan and a yawn ; and, turning in the direction of the light, to his great astonishment

to the waist, permitting only the hands to be visible, and then fell in folds to the ground; her head-dress was of the same material, peculiar in its form, but well suited to the features of the wearer, contrasting with the braided hair, that had once been of raven hue, but was now strongly tinged with the silvery mark of time or sorrow.

Walter had ample time for observation. The lady, for such she certainly was, spoke not, moved not, but held the lamp so that she might have a full view of his countenance; apparently the examination was not satisfactory, a shade of disappointment passed over her features, she sighed deeply, shook her head, and seemed about to retire. Walter felt like Acres,—that he was not quite so courageous as when he first opened his eyes; the dress—the figure—the mournful attitude—and, above all, the deep dejection of the wan and faded, but still beautiful countenance, gave an uncomfortable sensation, such as Walter had never before experi-

d. He wished she would speak; he had seen much in the gay world, had seen much of men, and a silent woman was an anomaly in the calculation of female qualifications. His sister Clara and his mother were talkers; and the three with whom he had lately been domesticated were equally gifted, and one delightfully so in his opinion; he neither liked the idea nor the reality of a dumb lady, and he almost began to fancy this was one. Insensibly the nursery tales of his childhood passed over his imagination: ghosts never spoke first,—“what a fool he was!”—and yet a slight tremor crept over him. The hour—the deep silence of night—the sable dress—the eager, the earnest gaze—the wan melancholy so plainly depicted in face and manner, were, it must be confessed, appalling, and Walter’s reputation for courage could scarcely be questioned, if he did hesitate to interrogate his midnight visitor; again she sighed heavily, and was turning to leave the bedside, when Walter, summoning his resolution, thus addressed her—

"Do you seek aught of me, Lady!"

The female looked intently at him, as if she did not quite understand. Walter repeated his question: at length, in a low, mournful, and as Walter thought, sepulchral voice, she answered him with another—

"Did you come from Astol Manor House?"

"I did, Lady."

"Yesterday?"

"Yesterday."

The female appeared to tremble as she continued—"You have been staying there some time?"

"I have—two months or more."

"Great God! You went there the night—"

"The house was attacked," interrupted Walter, pitying the agitation she could not control. Her trembling limbs could scarcely support her, and she sunk in a chair by the bedside.

"She is no ghost, that is certain," said Walter to himself.

Again she spoke—

"Your name, young gentleman?"

"She is no ghost, indeed," thought Walter, as he answered—"Rayland."

"Rayland!" repeated the lady, who appeared for a moment to be meditating, "Rayland,—ah, no!" Then, as if recollecting herself, she hastily added—"Your Christian name, that is not Rayland?"

"It is Walter."

"Walter!" Again she sighed and mused; it was only a brief space, when she continued,—
"Your father, is he living?"

"He is."

"And mother?"

"She is no ghost, indeed, but a regularly inquisitive and curious woman." Walter's private opinion did not delay his answer in the affirmative. Again his visiter sighed and shook her head, mournfully saying—

"It was cruel to deceive me;" then, as if a sudden thought occurred, she hastily and with eagerness inquired—"Is she your own

mother?—or your father's wife,—his wife?"

"This beats all," thought Walter; then—"She is my own mother, my father had but one wife."

"Where is his residence; and what you?"

"Commend me to curiosity. My estate is in Warwickshire, and I am just and-twenty."

"Ah! then it cannot——"

"What, Lady? What cannot?" asked seeing she now appeared inclined for silence.

The lady looked as if she did not understand him, and perhaps her agitation might have prevented his words from reaching her ears. However that might be, she made no remark.

"I wish," thought Walter, "she would while I get up and dress, and then I would as long as she required, and answer her queries."

The lady remained silent, and suddenly

extinguished, whether by accident or Rayland was unable to ascertain; he gave her a few moments for her to renew the conversation, when, finding she made no further reply, he spoke,—no answer was returned; he retired to himself in bed, but the night being so dark, it was impossible for him to distinguish if any person was in the room. Again he retired, but all was silent; he extended his arm to the place where the lady had been standing—there was a vacancy; the chair, on examination, was empty,—the lady then was gone. But the door had betrayed her departure.

"How strange," said Rayland: "after her questions and cross-examinations, she might have said farewell, or made some apology for disturbing my rest. I wonder for whom she was not myself, that's certain; and it's probable that she does not trouble herself about the propriety, after satisfying her own curiosity. Well, as she is gone, I may as well go to sleep, I mean. I hope this lady will

not visit me again; but how we may deceive ourselves!—I could have been positive I locked my door: however, I shall not get out of bed to make sure;—if she please to come again, she may." So saying, Rayland composed himself to finish his nap, and turning round in bed he was soon in sound repose.

Walter's slumber was undisturbed till within a short time of the breakfast hour, when a tap at the door awoke him.

"Come in," was his reply to the summons.

The handle of the lock moved, but no one entered. "Come in, the door is unfastened," he continued.

"I cannot open it," was the answer of Reuben.

"Push,—it is not locked."

"You must be mistaken, Mr. Rayland, I cannot open it."

"You don't push hard enough," said Walter, getting out of bed and approaching the door, which, to his amazement, was not only locked, but fastened with a drop-bolt.

"Well, this is strange!" said he, as he opened the door.

"What is strange, Sir?" inquired Reuben.

"That I should have had a nocturnal visiter, with my door fastened," was the reply.

"You are merry this morning, Mr. Rayland."

"Perhaps you will think having had a lady talking to me half the night is enough to make me merry."

"Why, not exactly in this house; there is no person in the Grange worth looking at, or speaking to, except my mother, and I hope you will not say she paid you a visit in your bed-chamber."

"At first I certainly did think it was your mother, come kindly to witness the accommodation of an invalid, but I did not keep that opinion long; when I have seen Mrs. Barwell again, I shall be able to speak more positively."

After Rayland had made his toilette, he descended to the parlour where he had been the previous evening, and received a friendly greeting

from his host and hostess; one glance was sufficient to prove that Reuben's mother was not the intruder on his slumber. Mrs. Barwell was what he imagined her, a good-looking and rather lady-like woman of forty, or perhaps more. The midnight visitor was decidedly handsome, and must, in her youth, have been a splendid woman, with an air of majesty and command about her which her mournful expression of countenance and melancholy gestures were not able to dispel,—she was, if once seen, not to be forgotten.

The breakfast-table was furnished with elegance and plenty, and Mr. Barwell, placing a chair near the fire, invited his guest to sit down, saying—"The mornings are rather cool Sir; this place is near the fire and table too."

"Thank you, Mr. Barwell; but are all your family assembled?"

"Yes, Sir, I have only Reuben. Elizabeth, looking at his wife, "has only one to spoil."

"But you have visitors?"

yourself, Sir. You are the only visitor we ever had since Mr. Penruddock forsook the world."

"Is there no person, no lady, at this time in your house?"

Barwell looked earnestly at Walter, asking at, or not comprehending the questions. Barwell also suspended her tea to hear the explanation of Mr. Raynham.

"Is there no person in our house besides the family?"

"It induces you to suppose we have, said Mrs. Barwell.

"I ask another question before I answer your kind hostess?"

"Be sure you may," said Mr. Barwell,

"then this is an old house, must have been long ago, and therefore ought to have been sold. Pray have you any rooms here?"

Mr. Barwell laughed heartily at the idea. Reuben, however, was silent, and Walter fancied the mistress rather changed colour.

"In an ancient building like this," said Walter, "a ghost is, or ought to be, a regular attendant; so if you demand my opinion, I should say the Grange is haunted, and the spirit paid me a visit last night."

A laugh went round the breakfast party; but Walter was so persuaded of the truth of his own senses, that he rather fancied the laugh was not a natural one.

"And pray what form did it take?" inquired Mr. Barwell, who was the first to speak.

"Of a very handsome woman, but not exactly young, though I would not speak certainly on that point. She appeared very sorrowful, and grief will add to years."

"You must not, Mr. Rayland, frighten my mother: she rather inclines to believe the marvellous—do you not, mother? and she will be afraid to sleep in the Grange, for fear of Mr. Rayland's spirit."

"My spirit!—for heaven's sake don't talk of my spirit. I am sure I hope I shall not walk when I leave this life."

Mrs. Barwell really did look very pale, and Walter, out of compassion, shortened his relation of what occurred in the night; when he had finished, he looked to his companions for their opinion.

"You were tired, Sir," said Mr. Barwell, "and your late dinner disagreed with you."

"Then you mean to say I had the nightmare?"

"Very probably, Sir," observed Reuben, "it must have been something of the kind; the days are gone by for supernatural appearances to be credited, except by my mother," continued Reuben, laughing at the pale face of Mrs. Barwell.

"And you will really take on yourself to say there is no person at the Grange above the rank of a domestic, except your own family?"

"I cannot say that at present, Sir: you do not belong ——"

"Of course, I except myself."

"Then, Sir, I assure you there is no other person at present in this house except yourself, my family and domestics."

"You will think me very impertinent, Mr. Reuben,—but, on your honour?"

"On my honour!"

"It is most surprising! I beg your pardon for my inquisitiveness and seeming impertinence; but had you seen my nocturnal visitor you might, perhaps, be equally rude."

Though Walter dropped the subject, he was not satisfied, but he said no more. He could not persuade himself it was an illusion: he remembered every word, every look, the dress, manner, voice,—all made a strong impression. He was certain, if he had been an artist in that line he could have drawn the portrait of the lady from memory; and he felt her too, for when she sunk in the chair she moved the bed-clothes

with her arm; he felt her breath,—oh! it was impossible he could be mistaken. But then the denial of the whole family, and, more than that, the door, which was locked when he arose in the morning. The lady was certainly too substantial to vanish through the key-hole, and besides, if that were the case, she would not have extinguished the lamp—no, she would have taken her departure in ghost-like glory. But old mansions had often concealed openings: 'tis true he examined every part before he descended to breakfast; there was certainly only that one door, only one visible passage; but every picture, every portrait, might conceal an entrance. His paternal house was a modern building, not quite so old as himself; Walter at this moment regretted that it was so. "If," thought he, "the old castle of Rayland were standing, I should understand how to detect secret passages and sliding doors; our old steward says there were plenty in the castle, it is too far a ruin now to find out trap-doors and openings concealed by picture-frames."

him to remain the day, and Walter much inclined : his curiosity was great and he wished to see if his nocturnal would again visit him ; and, besides, he might hear of Laura. His better feelings, however, prevailed. If the appearance of the specter was to be a secret, what right had he to divulge it with the wishes of those who had been so hospitable to him ? It was a poor comfort he had experienced, to be deceived, to discover what they evidently strove to conceal. Walter reproached himself for having hesitated one moment on the subject, and after bade farewell to his friendly hosts, accompanied by Reuben, he again mounted his horse, and proceeded through the glens and forest.

“ I am occupying your time : so

"You would have some trouble to do it; but you may make your mind easy on this account, as I have to ride to Maple Hatch Farm for our letters, which are usually left there: my mother expects one from her sister who is not well, so it is imperative that I should go to-day."

"And how far have you to go?"

"Only eight miles."

"Only eight miles—over this rough land! Have you no nearer post-town?"

"Not any. We are always obliged to send this distance."

"Then if I should wish to write to Mr. Penruddock, I must direct to a place eight miles from his abode?"

"Just so. But you have received letters since you have been residing at Astol; did you never observe the post-mark?"

"No, indeed. I never once thought of the trouble I was giving, and, perhaps, to you, Mr. Barwell."

"No great trouble to convey two letters in—"

stead of one; the difference of weight not bear me down."

"Does my route lead me by Maple Farm?" demanded Walter, after they had proceeded some distance.

"It does. The high-road is no great distance, and then you can take any direction."

"Without I find letters waiting at the office which may induce me to alter my course, I shall hasten to London, and from thence visit my family wherever they may be; but I do not intend visiting my father's estate till Christmas."

"If, Sir, you are not pressed for time, I can advise you to rest at Maple Hatch this evening; we have good accommodation—almost equal to the Grange; sometimes our family have resided there entirely. When there has been a young branch of the Penruddocks, they have been in possession of the Grange; when my father was a boy, there was an uncle of Mr. Penruddock residing there, and then my father's

lived wholly at Maple Hatch. But we are near the end of our ride; if you will rest at our farm ——”

Walter declined the offer, and Reuben, after conducting him to the market-town, returned to the Grange; and Walter the next morning departed for his father's house in London.

CHAPTER III.

What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.

WHEN Walter Rayland arrived at his house, he was agreeably surprised to find his family were resting there, and were in preparation to proceed in a few days to Warwickshire.

"We have been half over the world," said his sister Flora, "since we parted, and I began to fear we were not to meet again. I have been some days expecting you. I have been sadly disappointed if you had not been ——"

"Our letters have played at cross purposes," said Walter. "I would not willingly have missed your welcome—but don't look foolish; I hate to see her hang her head as if it did not belong to her because she is going to be married. But"

where is the bridegroom elect—the brave and gallant Reginald !”

“ If you are going to quiz, Walter, I’m off. I am not in the humour to listen to your nonsense; and, remember, it may be your own case one of these days.”

“ I care not how soon,” exclaimed Walter, interrupting her.

“ When it does come, you will not like quizzing more than ——”

“ My sister. I dare say not,—but I shall be very glad to try.”

“ You glad to try!—you!—why, Walter, where have you learned to fib? Have not I heard you for hours and days together exclaim against marriage, domestic cares, and women?”

“ Perhaps you might. But then I had not been an inhabitant of ——”

“ Of where, pray? I thought, when you left town, you were going to roam

In woodland dell, and seek a sylvan home.”

“ I found it too! And oh, Flora,—I found

‘the prettiest lass!’—no, no;—I cannot of her in a light strain. But my heart, is irrecoverably gone.”

“Ha! ha! ha!—Poor, dear, merry turned into a dying, sighing swain, for the third and twentieth time.”

“I beg your pardon, Miss Flora. I mistalked nonsense and flirted,—but I never before.”

“True, I believe you are right there; pray what divinity has enchanted you?—a nymph, of course.”

“Pray has Mr. Trevallian never honoured you with a letter while you were on your travels?”

“Oh, many—full of loves, doves, and darts!”

“And did he never mention me and my affairs?”

“Never. Indeed he had so much to do with himself, and respecting business too, that he had no room to speak of any one else.”

“So much for friendship!”

"Ah! but you know, Walter, Love is such an impudent rogue, he will take precedence."

"And will assurance always succeed, sister?"

"If you have any particular motive for your inquiry, I will endeavour to recollect; but all this time you are tantalizing my curiosity;—come, tell me who is your flame?"

"If you will be serious, you shall know all; but I cannot jest about Laura Penruddock."

"Mercy, what a name! Laura is very well, very pretty, sentimental, and so forth; but Pen, and Rud, and Dock, what a combination! Pen-rud-dock!—Mercy, Walter, if she be worth having, change it for her, poor thing! as fast as possible."

"Poor thing! The name is of the same country as the one you intend taking, and, in my opinion, the combination sounds as well as Tre-val-lian."

"No,—that's not right. You have not divided it properly,—Tre-vall-ian. I am sure that sounds well. You make a lion of the last syllable, or something very like it."

"It is dull enough, though, that we should both have fixed on Cornish names; but that is the only resemblance. My Laura (would she were mine!) is lovely, innocent, amiable, and young. Now match those qualities."

"My Tre—, no, Reginald, is handsome, noble, brave, and young. My four qualities run off better than yours."

"But I don't wish mine to run off. O Laura! may thy charms remain till I have ceased to value them; or till thy virtue, too pure for earth, shall have translated thee to realms of bliss!"

"Pray step nearer the light, young man, that I may see if this be my very brother Walter Rayland or not. I should not like to tell my family secrets to a stranger."

"'Tis even so, Flora, but wofully changed."

"Changed indeed! past all belief; but time must prove if there be any truth in the case."

"Then you do not think I am altered for the worse?"

"Oh, I know you now—there spoke Walter Rayland."

"Oh Laura! I defy you, Flora, to match her."

"I don't wish to; but I could perhaps recollect one as ——"

"Oh, you are thinking of Trevallian. Nonsense!—Laura is like yon bright star, only the smoke prevents one from seeing it."

"And my paragon is like a star when all around is clear, so that every ray may be visible."

"Laura is like yon delicate flower! I wish the blacks of London would not fall upon it."

"My flower shines in its native soil, where no dust nor damp can attend it."

"That jewel on your bracelet is an emblem of her purity and worth."

"The brightest diamond in the regal crown is worthless compared to the goodness and integrity of my ——"

"Go on.—Of your Trevallian, you mean to say."

"Well, perhaps I do; and who shall contradict me?"

"Not I, certainly; particularly when the gentleman, having heard your eulogium, may perhaps call me to account if I venture to gainsay your word."

Flora turned hastily, and, to her great dismay, her lover was beside her, listening with delight to what had passed.

"This is not fair to steal in upon one so, Mr. Trevallian; and Walter has been amusing himself by making a fool of his sister."

"It is so long since we met, Flora," said Trevallian, shaking hands with Walter, "that I could not wait to be announced, when I heard your brother had arrived, and you know how anxious we were about him."

"But you could wait to hear what I said. Was that honourable?"

"Not quite, I acknowledge; and yet I cannot regret having listened to Walter's praise of some unknown fair."

"Oh, well, if you only heard Walter's nonsense, it is all well."

"Well, then," said Walter, "if all is well, I will take my departure, and so farewell; they are too much in love to notice a pun," said Walter, as he descended the stairs to seek his father, to whom he related his love affair, and asked his advice.

"This is a serious business, Walter, not to be lightly treated; you are very young, and if the lady is an heiress, will the son of a private gentleman be deemed sufficiently grand and high enough in the world's estimation? Penruddock—Penruddock—"

"The devil!" thought Walter, "I hope my father's not going to spell over the name as Flora did."

"Where have I heard the name before, Walter?"

"I am sure I don't know, Sir, unless it was in the 'Wheel of Fortune.' This is worse than Flora, to pretend not to know the name." This idea Walter also kept to himself.

"True, Walter. Roderick Penruddock,—a very fine character; John Kemble performed it admirably. You never saw John Kemble, Walter?"

"The devil take John Kemble, and Charles Kemble, and all the Kembles! I shall never make my father understand my feelings." This was another aside.

"Penruddock,—Penruddock,—I cannot call to mind."

"But, my dear Sir, it is not necessary to my tale, that you should prove this gentleman to be an old acquaintance."

"You are right, Walter; but bless me, where have I heard it before? However, as you say, it can have nothing to do with your love for the young lady. And now, Walter, what do you wish me to do?"

"Why, if you do not object to my forming a matrimonial connexion with Miss —, with this gentleman's daughter, perhaps you will endeavour to gain her father's consent."

"That I will, with all my heart; and if she

be what you describe,—good and amiable, and altogether so desirable—I do not care whether she be an heiress or not; there will be enough for you, Walter, to live as your father and mother have done before you, and Heaven bless you with it, my dear boy."

"And Heaven bless you," thought Walter—this was an involuntary aside: he could not speak the feeling that choked his utterance—"and forgive me my irritation."

"I suppose you wish me to write soon?"

"The sooner the better, Sir."

"Well, then, I will write to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" another aside. "Well, I must not press him when he is so kind,—and kind he always is."

The dinner-bell prevented Walter from acquainting his mother. With the exception of Trevallian, they were alone, and when the servants retired, Mr. Rayland at once commenced the subject by asking his wife

"If she knew the name of Penruddock?"

Mrs. Rayland hesitated a moment, and was going to answer, when, to Walter's annoyance, his sister repeated the name—"Pen-rud-dock, mamma, did you ever hear that name before?"

"Often, Flora, in Hampshire."

"There, Flora, my mother is not such a—heh!—My mother has a better memory than you have."

"Why did you not finish your first sentence, Walter?" asked Flora, laughing.

"Because," said Walter, laughing also, "because you have some one to fight your battles without attending to justice,—and I, not being in a fighting humour, it would be rather inconvenient."

"Well, my dear," asked the elder gentleman, "what do you know about the Penruddocks?"

"Only that they are a very ancient family of distinction; and surely you must remember the beautiful Mrs. Penruddock!—she was the admiration of the world for a few summers, and then I believe she died, or went into retirement, for

I do not recollect her being in society for many years."

"She died, mother, and Mr. Penruddock has lived a lonely, solitary life ever since."

"But, my dear mamma," said Flora, "you have not half my curiosity; you do not ask the why and wherefore of all this."

"There is a why and wherefore, then? and pray what is it all about?"

"Why, my dear, this is rather public for such sort of communications; but Reginald is one of the family, so we may talk over our secrets before him."

"My dear mother," said Walter hastily, as if tired of the subject being treated lightly, "I am only thinking of following the example of Trevallian."

"With Miss Penruddock?"

"If she will have me."

"Then you have not proposed yet, Walter?"

"No indeed, Flora."

"Oh, then all this may turn out nothing."

"And if so, I had rather the subject had not been mentioned; but you, Flora, are so impatient."

"Well, I hope my impatience will not impede your happiness, brother. I would not have breathed it even to the winds."

"But what do you say, my dear?"

The question was not so easily answered; it is no trifling matter for a mother to be told that her only son intends forming a connexion which will deprive her of the place in his love that she has hitherto possessed; she will no longer be the first person in his affection. Mrs. Rayland felt all this, but she struggled with the pain her feelings inflicted so successfully, that she cheerfully drank success to her son's enterprise.

Many were the sheets of paper wasted and the pens spoiled before Mr. Rayland completed a letter to the satisfaction of himself and son. This method of proceeding did not quite meet Walter's approbation; he would rather have pre-

ferred his suit to the lady, than her father, but in this case it was impossible, and he must go on in a way he altogether disliked. "Ah, well," he thought, "it signifies nothing about the means, if the end answers; and if it should not, what shall I do then? Why then—I'll e'en set off on my travels, and forget—no I shall never forget—Laura Penruddock!"

The day after the letter was dispatched was the one appointed for Flora's nuptials, when the happy couple were to leave town on a tour to the continent, and the rest of the family were to proceed to Rayland Castle. The party in the drawing-room were unusually quiet on this evening; Walter was occupied with his cogitations, respecting probabilities and possibilities, too full of fears and anticipations to enjoy the present, or to look forward with hope to the future—very unlike his usual custom. Lovers on the eve of marriage are never gay; while fathers and mothers are too anxious respecting the unknown fate of their child, who will soon be no more to them, at least not as she has

been. In Flora Rayland's case there was every prospect of comfort and happiness; a match of love, sanctioned by friends and warranted by prudence—every thing looked well for the young couple.

"We are very silent," exclaimed Mr. Rayland; "ring for some wine, Walter. We must not be dull; we have been so busy with the lawyers this day, that I think we are infected."

"Happiness and mirth are not always allied," observed Trevallian, "and I trust that is the case with all at present;—it is with me."

Flora looked the agreement with her lover's sentiment which her heart dictated; but it would not have been well for her, perhaps, to have proclaimed it so openly.

"I," said Walter, "am silent from fear that the expected happy day will not extend to me."

"Remember the proverb, and faint not, lest the proverb turn against you," said Trevallian.

"You have seen Walter's flame, have you not, Reginald?" asked Flora.

"For a moment, only."

"And what is your report?"

"Why, if I were not in love with Flora Rayland, I could admire your brother's wood nymph. She is a sweet pretty creature, and the rest of our companions were most outrageously envious at Walter's good luck in being wounded, and so admitted as a visiter at Astol."

"It will be an unlucky wound for me if—— but it is time to separate; remember we all rise early to-morrow," said Walter; and bidding them good night, he retired.

The morrow proved fine, a good omen for the bride, to whom it foretells happiness, if the sun's beams shine through the stained glass of the church windows; and the glorious rays did shine on Flora. The mother's heart accepted the omen, and was cheerful, when the parting kiss was given to her daughter.

CHAPTER III.

I pray thee peace: I will be flesh and blood;
 For there was never yet philosopher
 That could endure the tooth-ache patiently,
 However they have writ the style of Gods,
 And made a pish at chance and sufferance.

THE wonder and mystery attending the introduction of the gipsy-boy as the companion of Mr. Penruddock's daughter prevented Walter's absence from being so much regretted as it would otherwise have been; but he would have felt no great cause of complaint, if he had known how many sighs were given for the want of his amusing conversation; though, perhaps, that might not have satisfied him; but, certainly, Lucy thought more of Mr. Evelyn than of any other person.

"Such a sprig of a boy to take upon him the style and title of Mister! Pray, Laura," said she suddenly, one day, "is Evelyn the sirname,

or Christian appellation of this young gentleman?"

"I am sure, Lucy, I cannot say; you know quite as much of him as I do: but let his name be what it may, he is well bred and well educated."

"And good tempered, too," added Lucy. "Truth compels me to vouch for that in his behalf; but I wish he would be a little more communicative. I tried, the other day, to find out if he had a name besides Evelyn; but no, he was too deep for me: without contradicting or refusing, he contrived to evade my questions, and I left off as wise as I began—he must be clever for that."

"He must indeed, Lucy, to keep your curiosity at bay."

"If I had wished to learn anything of Mr. Rayland, I should have succeeded in half the time."

"Then you have not so good an opinion of Mr. Rayland's capacity?"

"In this particular respect I have not."

"But I hope you like our new companion?"

"Why, yes, well enough; but I should certainly think much better of him if he were not quite so close. Should you not like to know the contents of that most wonderful letter, Laura? It acted like magic on your father."

"I should have no objection, certainly; but as there is no possible chance of our curiosity being gratified in that respect, it is as well to be contented without. I suppose he is related to our family, for my father told me I was to consider and treat him as a brother."

"A brother! Laura. Did Mr. Penruddock say, brother?"

"Yes, Lucy,—to behave with kindness as I would to a brother.—What do you see so extraordinary in that?"

Lucy pressed her lips together, looked wise, but made no remark.

"Our new acquaintance has a fine taste for music," said Laura, after a pause. "I expect we shall profit by his knowledge."

"He is not deficient, I believe, in many accomplishments; but a little will pass current with us."

"I don't quite agree with you in that respect. We have had time to improve. Practice, I have heard, has more weight than precept; and you know, Lucy, we have no distracting gaiety to call us from study."

"Alas, no! you may well say that;—but here is Margaret; what does she want?"

Margaret was sent to tell Miss Penruddock that her master required his daughter's presence in the library.

"Indeed! This is not the usual time: did he speak to you, Margaret?"

"No, ma'am. Brenner brought the message."

"Very well, Margaret, I will be with him immediately."

"Lucy," said Laura, "you have infected me with your anticipation of wonders. I almost expect to hear something uncommon."

"There 'needs no ghost' to tell us that, my

dear;—the mere fact of Mr. Penruddock's siring your presence is extraordinary; it is a complete deviation from rule;—but if you will obey my advice, you will obey as quickly as possible—for the sake of my poor curiosity."

Laura hastened to the library. Mr. Penruddock was seated at a table, and so deeply occupied with a letter, that he did not at first notice his daughter's entrance.

Mr. Penruddock had been surprised in the morning by a message from Mr. Groves, who had conducted the business of his steward for so many years without his master's interference, that when he did solicit an audience, it always came upon Mr. Penruddock as an uncomfortable and not a pleasant event. Had it been possible, the Lord of Astol would have relinquished even this trifling intercourse with the world; but he was aware that it was absolutely imperative, and he submitted to the evil.

In this particular instance, he even expressed more than his usual impatience at having

attention called, as he thought, to pecuniary concerns, adding, "I saw Groves last week, Brenner; he can have no important business; tell him so, and that I am not disposed to look into accounts to-day, particularly as they are always right."

Brenner soon returned, saying Mr. Groves had something of consequence to impart.

"Well, then, admit him; but I trust he will not detain me long."

Groves explained his errand in as few words as possible. He had that morning received from Reuben Barwell a packet addressed to himself, containing one for Mr. Penruddock, and begging he would deliver it with his own hand.

"I thought, Groves, I had given you direction to open all letters?"

"You did, Sir, many years ago; but it is so long since, that I did not know if you would still wish me to do so, particularly as this comes from the gentleman who has been staying here."

"I wish, Groves, to have no communication whatever with the world. You are quite equal to arranging all my affairs, and in your integrity I have the fullest confidence. Read the contents of that packet, and if they require an answer, send one; it can be merely a letter of thanks."

Groves left the room, but shortly after he again entered it. Mr. Penruddock looked displeased.

"I beg your pardon, Sir, but this letter is for your own private inspection."

"But if I appoint you my deputy, Mr. Groves, then it is your duty." This was spoken in rather a stern voice and manner, and Mr. Penruddock rose as if to leave the room.

"Indeed, Sir," said Groves, submissively but firmly, "I cannot answer this."

"And why not, Mr. Groves?"

"Because it relates to your daughter—to Miss Penruddock, Sir."

"To Laura!—How can it relate to her?"

Mr. Groves held the letter, saying, "This will explain all, Sir, and it is not very long."

Mr. Penruddock hesitated; but, at last, took the packet, and, desiring Mr. Groves not to leave the Manor House, he unwillingly examined the letter addressed to him, which contained one also for Laura.

The letter from Mr. Rayland, explaining his son's prospects, and requesting permission to endeavour to gain an interest in his daughter's heart, caused as much amazement to Mr. Penruddock as if he had not had a daughter to bestow. All this was so completely out of his calculation, that he was totally bewildered. He had never anticipated the idea of Laura ever being seen by the world, or one of the world; and that she should now be addressed in the way of marriage was astonishing, and his meditations were deep and painful.

"Laura in marriage!—the young man's happiness depends on it!—What can they mean?—Laura to be married!—four thousand a year!"

Long did Mr. Penruddock ponder over Mr. Rayland's letter. The result of his deliberation was to send for his daughter. He did not immediately observe her entrance; and when he did, it required some little time to consider in what way to commence. Laura, however, was the first to begin.

"Did you send for me, dear father?"

"I did, my dear. I have just received a letter concerning you."

"Concerning me!"

Notwithstanding Mr. Penruddock had been meditating how to enter on the subject without abruptness, his feelings were too much agitated to attend to method or preface. In reply to his daughter's exclamation of surprise, he could only answer, "Yes, Laura, from Mr. Rayland.—Tell me, my child, did that young gentleman ever speak to you of love—of love for you?"

"Of love for me! Never, papa."

"But he was attentive and kind?"

"Very—and to Lucy and Mrs. Weston."

"But his attention to them was not the same that he expressed for you?"

"I saw no difference;—he was polite and obliging to both;—he was the same to me."

"Could you be contented to pass your life with Mr. Rayland?"

Laura hesitated as she answered, "She was very sorry when he went away."

Mr. Penruddock sighed deeply, and remained some moments silent.

"You would be pleased if he were to return?"

"Yes, I should, very pleased." The ready reply did not remove Mr. Penruddock's anxiety; again he sighed.

"You would not be sorry if he were to live here for ever?"

"No indeed, papa, if you were pleased also."

Mr. Penruddock's sighs were more frequent.

"My dearest Laura, I have received from the father of this young gentleman an offer of marriage for you: all things are eligible: in birth and education he is your equal; in wealth you

are superior; but that is of trifling import, you will have plenty for both. Is it your wish to accept the proposal?"

Mr. Penruddock had been so long abstracted from the world, that he had for the moment forgotten that Laura was perfectly ignorant of all matters relating to love or marriage; and when he gave her Walter's letter, she really did not know what to do with it. It was the first letter she had ever received—with the exception of the sealed paper given by the gipsy-boy, it was the first she had ever seen—nothing of the kind having, till this period, been admitted at Astol. Mr. Penruddock appeared to wait patiently till Laura had found out how to open the delicate and highly-glazed paper, containing the effusions of Walter's devoted attachment. Though Mr. Penruddock was not impatient by nature, and sorrow had the effect of making him more keenly alive to his own errors, and more willing to endure, yet it was scarcely possible for him to wait with composure while the light was slowly

breaking on the mind of his daughter. As Laura's comprehension of the meaning of the letter increased, so did the colour rise to her cheeks. Mr. Penruddock attentively regarded her; she leaned back in her chair, absorbed in thought; her father was painfully agitated; he remained silent; but a tear fell from his eye, and was quickly wiped away, unseen, unnoticed by his daughter. Again Laura perused the letter; again the varying colour told a tale of anguish to her father's heart. "He should lose his only earthly comfort; he should lose the only being for whom he wished to live;—but did he deserve to keep her? Was she not too great a blessing for one who had sinned so deeply? Laura was too good, too pure, and heaven deemed him unworthy to retain her as his own." The piercing pang that Mr. Penruddock felt could only have been experienced by one whose happiness or peace rested on a single chance, and that chance was against him;—cold perspiration stood on his brow;—but Laura saw it not; her attention was engrossed by her lover's

pleadings. A feeling worse than death came over him; the faintness of the heart:—but Laura's heart was, at that moment, insensible to all but the paper she was so intently perusing. "This is the bitterness of death," he thought; "the separation of the soul and body must be light to my sufferings:—fool that I was not to expect this; not to anticipate that some unhappy chance would rob me of all that renders life endurable! My sweet Laura! I shall cease to gaze on that face, so dear, so idolized—the only memorial of my sainted Florence! But I shall not long mourn, misery will end those days which have been supported by the smiles of innocence, by the cheerful influence of thy child, my Florence! Oh, God, will my sins be remembered in another world?"

Mr. Penruddock's sensations were now too keenly agonizing to be defined. He waited with silent attention, but not one word did he utter, not one sigh could he now breathe; his feelings were suffering too severely even for that trivial relief to be afforded: but he struggled so

ly, that Laura was perfectly unconscious of her misery ; and when she had repeatedly commenced and finished her letter, Mr. Penruddock so far recovered himself as first to break silence :—his abstracted companion was startled when he addressed her, saying, “ Laura, my daughter, you love this young stranger ?” Laura made no reply. “ I need not ask what answer I shall send ; do you love this stranger, Mr. Rayland ?” Laura gazed earnestly at her father ; but it might be doubted whether she perfectly understood his meaning. “ I will reply to this letter in the affirmative ; but we must delay proceedings till we have entered more particularly into his character and conduct. During the short time we have known him, he appeared every way desirable ; but we cannot trust to appearances, when your happiness, my child, is at stake.” Mr. Penruddock’s voice was so expressive of grief, and his countenance exhibited so much mournful sorrow,

if not agony, that Laura's attention was now fully recalled to her father. Her thoughts were still deeply engrossed, but their object was changed. The letter was laid aside, but the meditations of Laura were too profound to allow of speech; and some time elapsed in perfect silence, which Mr. Penruddock again broke.

"You are not required, my dearest, to give an immediate answer. Deliberate on this matter; and, when you have decided, I will communicate with the elder Mr. Rayland."

"But stay, my dear father, and tell me what your wishes are on this subject."

"Mine!—Oh, mine, in this case, would be of little moment."

"Not to me, papa. You are more to me than any person; and I could not bear to see you look so wretched as you do now."

"You will not see it, Laura; you will be far away from me. When you have once lived in the world, you will find little pleasure in the solitude of Astol; or, think you, a gay young man, like Mr. Rayland, could bear it? But

Laura, the sorrow of leaving your father will soon pass away, and perhaps you may even regret the time spent in seclusion, when you were the only solace to a broken heart."

"But you would go with me, papa?" A mournful shake of the head was not a sufficient answer for the affectionate girl.

"It would be as great a misery for me to enter the world again, as it would be to you, Laura, never to visit what, no doubt, you have heard described in glowing colours."

"But, my dear father, will not my absence take from your comfort? You will not be happier when I have left Astol?"

"I happier—Oh, God!" exclaimed Mr. Penruddock, "happiness has long fled from me; and the little comfort I have will leave me, when you say farewell."

"Then I will never say it. You, my dear father, shall never grieve for any voluntary act of mine. Why did you not send an answer without consulting me?"

A thrill, almost of joy, went to the heart of Mr. Penruddock, which he feared to entertain lest it should prove a delusion. Laid to rest;—and was he not selfish to allow himself to decide thus hastily? It was perfectly evident that his daughter had a feeling of partiality for the young man; and if, at present, it was not of sufficient strength to merit the name of love, it was a sentiment that, perhaps, only required time to mature into deep and ardent affection. No possible objection could be made to the position and prospects of Mr. Rayland; and what they had seen of his manners and character, it was a match every way eligible. Penruddock would have felt less pain in signing his own death-warrant, than he now experienced when he represented to his daughter the disadvantages that might attend her union with Mr. Rayland.

“But you will not be happy, dear father,” said she.

“I have told you, my dear child, that I have no world happiness and I have parted for ever from her.”

“And you will be less comfortable than you have been.”

Mr. Penruddock was silent; but Laura too well understood his mournful but expressive countenance. Fondly kissing him, she said, "Answer your letter, my dearest father, and I will reply to mine; but say in yours, that Laura Penruddock lives for her father's comfort; with which no other person shall interfere!"

Before Mr. Penruddock recovered power to speak, Laura had left the room; and hastening to the sea-turret, she wrote a polite, but firm and kind refusal, giving the true reason for her rejection of Walter's hand.

Walter Rayland was greatly disappointed; but the motive for Laura's conduct gave no mortification to his feelings. It was not him she refused—she only objected to place any other person before her father. If Walter had not been a resident at Astol, he would not have been able, perhaps, so well to comprehend her motive; but now he understood it perfectly, and it raised the object of his affection still higher in his esteem. In reply to Mr. Penruddock (for he

chose to consider that the letter he had received required an answer), he expressed his sentiments fully, adding, "That while he deplored his disappointment, he submitted; but he should not relinquish the hope of being, at some future period, considered worthy of being admitted to share, with Laura, in the pleasing employment of contributing to her father's comfort." Walter, perhaps, could not have rested so quietly, but Mr. Penruddock stated in his letter, that, if there were no other obstacle, he should consider Laura much too young, even to know her own wishes on so momentous a subject.

Walter listened to the advice of his family, and prepared to travel for two or three years: it would then, as his father said, be quite time enough to think of marrying. After spending a few weeks at Rayland Castle, he left England, and proceeded through Holland and Germany to Italy.

CHAPTER IV.

What you do

Still betters what is done; when you speak, sweet,

I'd have you do it ever; when you sing,

I'd have you buy and sell so, so give alms,

Pray so,—and for the ordering your affairs

To sing them too; when you do dance, I wish you

A wave of the sea, that you might ever do

Nothing but that.

WHEN the letter was despatched to Walter Rayland, his reply received, and again answered in a friendly strain by Mr. Penruddock, the affairs at Astol appeared to glide into their usual quiet channel: day succeeded day, one month was followed by another, and the seasons had each abided their time without any material alteration in the regular routine of the Manor House. Laura's temporary depression had vanished, Lucy was gay as ever, and Evelyn had almost lost the appearance of the gipsy boy in the tall slim young man, who was improving

not only in person but in the favour of his companions. Lucy declared he was quite "a God-send," and Lucy had another reason for rejoicing at his residence at Astol ; she lent a willing ear to "a tale of love," told, or rather whispered, by Reuben Barwell. They were afraid to speak out. Lucy had not forgotten Mr. Penruddock's reception of her wish to see the world; that wish was quite gone, the boundaries of Astol were now world enough for her; the Grange she had never seen, but by Reuben's description it was all she could desire, and they both, without even dreaming of any definite time, looked forward with hope, and enjoyed the present. Reuben often, or rather always, contrived to meet them in their evening's walk; and Lucy, to prevent Miss Penruddock from being interrupted when she was discoursing with Mr. Evelyn, had the kindness to walk with young Mr. Barwell; and at last, without any thought being bestowed on the affair, it seemed quite a regular concern that Lucy should loiter

and talk nonsense with Reuben, while Evelyn and Laura strolled farther in the park, keeping a respectful distance, so that neither party could interfere with the other, and yet were sufficiently near to prevent the idea of a solitary walk.

Laura had obeyed her father most implicitly in treating Evelyn as a brother, and as such she seemed to consider him—"very natural," as Lucy thought. But Lucy was sometimes puzzled in what light to view the devotion of the gentleman; to the experienced eye of the elder maiden, who had lived nearly two years longer in this world of joy or sorrow, as people incline to term it, Evelyn did not behold Laura with a brother's love. "Well," she would say, when she had pondered and wearied herself with conjecture, "it is Mr. Penruddock's affair, not mine." Both the young ladies found their companion a great acquisition at Astol; he could dance, sing, and draw; besides the more solid accomplishment of "classic lore." His education had been carefully attended to, and his

mind well cultivated. The moments never did pass heavily at the Manor House, to the youthful part of the family, but now they flew; as Lucy said—"They were no sooner up, than they went to bed again." Walter Rayland might not now have been so contented if he had known how blithely, how jocundly their moments glided on. Whatever feeling Laura might have had when he left, had passed away, and friendship, sincere and grateful, but still only friendship, remained. But they often spoke of him, and Evelyn was ever foremost in praising his kind heart and cheerful disposition.

"I should like," said Laura, one day when the rain prevented them from walking, "I should like, Evelyn, to know your reason for assuming a disguise?"

"Disguise!—What do you mean, Laura?"

"Why, the disguise of a gipsy. If you wished so much to come here, why did you not say so at once to my father, and show him the paper that made you our companion?"

"But I did come from a gipsy camp."

"So did Mr. Rayland, yet he was no gipsy."

"The tents I left for Astol were very different from those gay bowers inhabited by Mr. Rayland," replied Evelyn.

"And yet very different from a real vagrant camp. No, no, my good friend, you must not attempt to deceive us; you think, because we have never been out of sight of the park-paling, that we know nothing. If we are not allowed to use our eyes, we have ears and willing ones; and we know very well that you could not have gained your knowledge among strollers; so, for want of better employment, I pray you to recount what brought you to the forest, and what induced my father to receive you as his guest. Your adventures must be wonderfully surprising!"

"And painful, too; but I will not torment you," said he, interrupting himself and laughing, "with what I term the misery and wretchedness of my early days, lest you should deride me for making mountains of mole-hills."

"That alone need not deter you : and I never had the pleasure of seeing you. Your mole-hills might maintain their position without fear of derangement from a ledge."

"I do not allow the possibility of that lowered, even by female sophistry. But I will not try,—my cherished secret I must keep a short time longer."

"Not, I hope," said Lucy, "till our patience is worn out, and we no longer care to keep it. But I expect that will be the case, for we are as close as this box which I have been endeavouring to open for the last half-hour."

"Let me open it for you?"

"No," said Lucy, colouring, "I will do that."

"Oh! then I guess what it is, and I will take it as a token."

"You can keep your secret, Mr. I can I mine; if you like to make an exception why then, indeed——"

Evelyn shook his head, and laughed

"'Tis you, Lucy, who are making a mountain of my little hillock."

"We must let the high and low rest in peace, for there is the dinner-bell," exclaimed Lucy.

It would have been evident to any person practised in those affairs, that however Laura might regard Evelyn, he felt for her a deep and ardent devotion, not usual nor natural in one so young; he appeared to live only to attend her wish, to anticipate her desire, and except, in the one instance of his former life, Laura had only to declare her will to the enamoured boy. When it was arranged that he was to remain at Astol, a messenger was despatched to the camp he had left, and various packages and boxes were sent to the Manor House. Many were the wonders those boxes contained—books, prints, and a guitar, with divers fashionable toys, quite sufficient, as the maiden observed, to clear him of the imputation of being a vagrant—"Without," said Laura, laughing, "they are

stolen goods." The boy would play and sing with his eyes fixed on the face before him, but those glances were not noticed by Laura; occupied with her work or drawing, she listened with delight to the lay, without attending to the import of the words. Evelyn would have sung from morn to night, 'from noon to dewy eve—a livelong summer's day,' had his fair auditors been so long attentive.

Often in the summer evenings they strolled to a small eminence in the park, where there was a distant view of the sea, when Laura would listen to the soft airs that Evelyn played and sung from memory, and receive instruction in the same science, which he was well able to give.

Lucy professed not to be so very fond of music, it sometimes made her head ache. Her companions were too much occupied with their own ideas to notice that whenever Lucy was unable to listen, Reuben Barwell was waiting for a walk; and it was natural for Lucy to prefer the

words addressed to herself,—the songs were for another.

At the top of the ascent there was an old and large hawthorn, which formed a delightful shade from the rays of the sun; while the earliest flowers of spring flourished in this favourite spot, and the wild rose scented the air. It was the chosen retreat of the young inmates of Astol; and one morning Evelyn proposed taking their music and books to enjoy the cool breeze at leisure: Laura gladly assented, but Lucy had some engagement with Mrs. Weston that would detain her in the house.

Evelyn and his companion were soon seated under the tree, where they had formed a low rustic bench, covered with moss, which Evelyn declared was superior to all the fashionable couches.

"The guitar is not in tune to-day, Laura; shall I read to you," said Evelyn, "while you sketch some of those beauties before us?"

"If you please, Evelyn."

"Here is a volume of Lord Byron, do you like his writings?"

"I think I am not sufficiently acquainted with them to be able to judge. Lord Byron is contemporary with yourself; you first introduced his works at Astol."

"That will be two years in a few more months, and surely that is plenty of time to get well acquainted with more books than Byron has written. You do admire him, Laura?"

"You admire him so much that perhaps you will be displeased if I differ from you?"

"Displeased with you! Oh, fear not that! But what is your opinion?"

"The poetry is beautiful; but I do not like his characters."

"Indeed! and why not?"

"Because they are not natural."

"Not natural, my dear Laura! Surely you mistake?"

"Very possibly, as to his characters; but not as to my impression of them."

"To me they seem so decidedly nature!"

"Do they?"

"Oh! exactly."

"Then you must have a poor opinion of our sex?"

"On the contrary; I think they are indeed heaven's last best gift, and Byron's verses confirm my idea."

"I have read that men think so, and yet consider them as playthings—mere automaton, to wait and minister to sovereign man; and such, from the poems you have shown me, was the light in which I imagine Lord Byron held them."

"I never before heard you, Laura, say any thing so contrary to reason."

"Nor did I ever hear you, Evelyn, say anything half so ungallant before; nor can I fancy you are really sincere, when you say these poems are in praise of women."

"But can you not feel the beauty of his descriptions?"

"Undoubtedly; but not the beauty of his characters."

"But why do you object to them?"

"Because they appear to me so tame, so devoid of all feeling, save one,—love, or what they call love. I trust I shall never know the love Lord Byron eulogizes. Surely it is not necessary that a woman should forswear her parents, friends, or relations, for one whom, in comparison, she has loved but yesterday. I can understand that a woman is to consider her husband as first, but not the only one in her affection."

"Nor does the noble poet say so."

"Then I misunderstand him, and I am glad of it, for I would fain think well of one who writes so sweetly; but truly the impression I have received from his *Medora*, *Gulnare*, and others, is not what would recommend them to my love, were I a man. They relinquish all ties, and for what—for whom? Not for men of high fame and virtue,—not for those who are loved

by their equals and respected by their country. No—the heroes of Lord Byron's creation are brave indeed, and that seems their only merit, their only virtue,—pirates, renegades, and robbers. No, dear Evelyn, you would never choose a friend from among his heroes; you would scorn the society of a man with 'one virtue and a thousand crimes;' nor would you wish a sister or a friend to love one of whom nothing more could be said."

"But to prove a woman's love is pure, sincere, and to be commended, it is not necessary that the object of her love should also be estimable."

"I have been taught to think it is, and I could love no other."

"A woman," observed Evelyn, "may be married to one who proves not worthy: it is then too late for her to change."

"It is, indeed, and she is much to be pitied; but Lord Byron's heroines do not appear to be bound by such ties. No, Evelyn, you must

not ask me to like them; indeed they are not natural."

"What can be more natural than this?" said Evelyn, opening the volume and reading a portion of 'The Dream,' to which Laura listened most attentively.

"It is indeed beautiful!" said Laura.

Evelyn paused, and looked at her with exultation in his voice and manner.

"And is it not natural?"

"Not very. But remember how little I know of the world; my world lies in a very small compass, about eight or ten that I have known from childhood, and two new friends. My knowledge must be from books, and I cannot suppose that is the best way of studying human nature; therefore you must bear in mind that I am ignorant."

"But even in your small circle you may have met a parallel case," said Evelyn, looking at her with increased earnestness.

"No, indeed."

"Oh, Laura, say not so! Listen, I will repeat a part.

'These two, a maiden and a youth, were there,
Gazing,—the one on all that was beneath,
Fair as herself.—But the boy gazed on her;
And both were young,—and one was beautiful,—
And both were young.—'

Laura, have you no parallel for this?

'To his eye

There was but one beloved face on earth,
And that was shining on him; he had look'd
Upon it till it could not pass away.'

Laura! dearest Laura! say not that this is unnatural."

"It is very beautiful, Evelyn, most beautiful! Will not that satisfy you?"

"It is life itself, Laura! Listen, I intreat."

Laura could not mistake his meaning; the ardour, the tenderness with which he spoke, all told

"She was his life,

The ocean to the river of his thoughts."

But Evelyn was merely a boy, and Laura laughed at the idea of his being in love.

"Is it not our own story, Laura?" said Evelyn, with tenderness and enthusiasm.

"I hope not. I should be sorry to find you so romantic; there is only one resemblance that I can find,—the lady is older than the gentleman,—I am your senior, Evelyn."

"That is the only resemblance that I do not see," returned Evelyn, coldly; "if you are correct in that respect, you do not show it."

Evelyn did not observe the smile that Laura endeavoured to suppress, as he rose from the ground and drew himself to his full height; but he would have forgiven the smile, if the admiration she felt at his dignified and graceful manner had been also visible.

"I am more than eighteen, Evelyn, and you are not quite seventeen; but really, I do not wish to prove the resemblance. I have no desire for either of us to be miserable—you forget what follows. Look," said Laura, taking the book out of his hand, "this is a fearful termination:—

‘The one

To end in madness, both in misery.’

My good Evelyn, do think of something cheerful to drive such thoughts from my mind!— Shall we have a race after Lucy?"

"Whatever you please, else I would pray to stay here and——"

"Ponder on all melancholy subjects. I am a votary of mirth, Evelyn, and I will help you to woo 'the mountain nymph, sweet Liberty,' as one of my favourite poets says:—

'And if we give him honour due,
Mirth will admit us of his crew;'

which is far better than sighing and wooing sorrow."

"I would fain not woo sorrow," said Evelyn, sighing. "I little thought, when first I entered the domain of Mr. Penruddock, that my doom was fixed. How often I have lingered over these beautiful lines; but I never imagined I should prove a living illustration of their reality;" and, with a rapidity that Laura could neither check nor control, he repeated—

' But she in these fond feelings had no share,
Her sighs were not for him ; to her he was
Even as a brother—but no more ;
Herself the solitary scion left
Of a time-honoured race.'

Laura thought her better plan would be to treat it lightly, and in a lively tone she said
" You cannot go on, Evelyn—you cannot add

' Even now she loved another ?'

and I am sure I never look for my lover's stead

" I am not so sure," thought Evelyn, " that you never have loved another ; and even now I do not like to mark the slight blush that even follows the name of Rayland."

" Evelyn," said Laura, " we must change the gloomy
dismals, else I shall be melancholy all day, and
if so you will have Lucy and Mrs. Weston to call
you to account. Come, if you do acknowledge
me your ' Ladye Love,' I will, as in days
yore maidens were wont to do, impose some
penance, or rather some trial of your constancy
put these mournful themes away, and tell me
something ' wild and high.' "

"Alas! I have no invention, and my heart is 'darkened by a shadow.'"

"Nonsense—do be rational. Come, I will name some tale for you to tell: you shall entertain me with your adventures in the gipsy camp; there must be novelty, if not amusement, in your relation. Without," said she, "you have some serious objection? I would not pain you, Evelyn, nor do I wish to rob you of your secret; but there are many things which you might recount without bringing either sorrow or danger on yourself. You must have seen more than I have."

"I would tell you, Lady, every thing concerning myself, but the early days of childhood could have little interest for you; and as to my secret, that I cannot betray, for I am a secret to myself." Laura looked earnestly at him, he continued: "Yes, it is no fiction; I know not who I am, nor what rank I bear in the world; but I have been told my race is equal to your own, Laura. I am not bound to secrecy on

the events of my early days. If you will listen, I will endeavour to relate all I know. Mine is a singular fate, and though now not sorrowful, will scarcely call forth mirth, or create cheerfulness."

"I am sure, Evelyn, I would not willingly cause you one painful moment; I was not serious; forget my wish, and once more take your guitar, re-open that book again, and I will listen to all your favourite poems. Or take a walk outside the park paling. If you follow the glade by the spot where the camp of the gentlemen stood, it will take you to the Grange, and Reuben Barwell will be proud to receive you. I am told it is a pretty wild path, or walk rather, for I believe there is no path; but the difficulty will give a turn to your dejection, and change the mournful tone of your thoughts."

"You are not then aware of what took place between Mr. Penruddock and myself before I was allowed to continue your guest? Your present advice proves you are not acquainted with

your father's stipulations. Before I received permission to remain at Astol, I gave my word to keep the same regulations that you and Lucy were under."

"Indeed! And are you not allowed to quit the park?"

"No further than you are. And there are places and parts of the park where I am forbidden to walk."

"The beech grove, I suppose?"

"Yes, that is one place. I may go as far each way as you are permitted; I could not wish greater latitude, at least it would be improper to desire it."

"You know, I suppose, why my father was induced to change his intention respecting your residence at Astol?"

"Indeed I do not."

"Nor what was in that paper?"

"I am as ignorant of its contents as you are."

"Well, this is wonderful! I gave you credit for great discretion, which I find you do not

deserve. But really if you can, without breach of confidence, or danger to yourself, relate some of the causes, or cause, that led to your being our guest, I need scarcely say how much I shall be pleased to hear it, and I will promise you to be secret."

"It might displease others if what I am about to relate were spoken publicly; for myself, I know no reason why I should be silent, and if you are disposed to listen, you shall know as much as I do."

CHAPTER V.

The lad can deftly touch the lute
 And on the rote and viol play,
 And well can drive the time away
 For those who love such glee;
 For me, the favouring breeze, when loud
 It pipes upon the galley's shroud,
 Makes blither melody.

'My days of childhood,' said Evelyn, after a short pause, "were passed in a small and comfortable dwelling, where I resided with a kind and elderly lady, whom I was accustomed to call aunt, and from whom I received the attention and care of a mother. I know not if I am constitutionally melancholy, or whether the secluded nature of my early education has given a mournful bias to my character; but I feel I am not like others. I have neither your cheerful gaiety of disposition, the mirth of Lucy, nor the frank, open merriment of Mr. Rayland, which I incline to attribute to my earliest friend. She was kind

and gentle; but I never remember to have seen her laugh. Ours was a quiet situation; an ornamented cottage at the extremity of the forest, about fifteen miles from Astol, and near a small scattered village, with patches of woodland between each cottage. Ours was the only dwelling above the rank of farmers and labourers; consequently, my aunt had little society. We had a parish church, but the curate lived at another village, and came once on the Sunday to perform duty, when he would rest for an hour at my aunt's. He was an elderly, grave man, with a large family; too much occupied with the care of providing for many sons and daughters to be able to spare more time for our amusement. Amusement! my poor aunt never appeared to think of amusement; but she was kind and generous: her daily employment was to provide for my comfort, and that of her poor neighbours. I had no other companion than my aunt, and no playmates even in the village:—as I said before, my relation was ever quiet, if

not sad; and when she would exert herself to relate some tale or legend, to entertain a winter's evening, they were always of a mournful tendency: even the domestics copied the grave demeanour of their mistress. We had not a large establishment; but we occasionally had to change a female servant, who was at the command of an aged woman who acted as house-keeper. This always caused some trouble, as few of the young women in the village could be tempted, even by my aunt's high wages, to encounter the dull uniformity of our family. Our cook was wife to the gardener—both steady, middle-aged persons. This was our establishment; and the only variation that ever occurred was in the younger female.

‘ Having been brought up in this peaceful seclusion, I suppose I was naturalized to monotony and melancholy: but I had no wish for change. My aunt had rather a large selection of books, and having no other amusement or occupation, I early learned to read; and while

other children of my age were engaged in the sports of infancy, I was poring over volumes far above my capacity of understanding: but I was amused, and my relation was satisfied, because I was quiet and contented. I had fortunately a taste for the charms of nature, and our part of the forest was particularly beautiful — clumps of woodland separating cultivated fields, with wild patches of heath or common, while a rivulet, in some parts wide and open, then contracted between high banks, fertilized and gave additional beauty to the scene.

‘The village was on the north of our cottage; on the south-eastern side a large park extended for miles, forming a sort of barrier between the small community in which we resided, and the cultivated and more inhabited part of the country, where the forest-land gradually disappeared, giving way to farms, villages, and towns, with the sea and Southampton Water at a distance. I know not why I am so particular, dear Laura; but when I read of a place, or hear one men-

tioned, I always like to know the localities; but, perhaps, I am tiring you?'

"No, indeed," replied Laura. "I am very much interested, and I promise, if I weary of your tale, I will tell you."

'In the centre of this park there was a large and modern mansion, the seat of a gentleman of rank and fortune, who occasionally paid a short visit to this estate, which was called Westwell. He was our landlord; and I remember my aunt, Mrs. Aubrey, always made a point of going to the hall soon after his arrival. She would never let me accompany her, which sometimes I wished to do: and as I advanced in years, I noticed that, on her return from the Park, she was always more dejected than usual; and, at the same time, her manner was even more kind and attentive to me. Though I never saw her laugh, and though she might be thought insensible, her manner being so grave and quiet, yet I have often felt her tears fall warm on my cheek, and particularly so when she had been longer at

Westwell than was customary. I well remember crying one day to go with her. She at first endeavoured to soothe me ; but when she found her efforts were unavailing, and that I insisted on being her companion, her agitation was extreme ; and some words escaped that made a deep impression on my memory : as she tenderly caressed me, she murmured,—thinking, perhaps, I should not attend to her low tone of voice,—“ My poor Evelyn, 'tis cruel, indeed, to keep you from Westwell!—who has so much right to be there ?” I was very young at that time, not more than seven ; but the words, and, perhaps more, the manner of Mrs. Aubrey, remain fresh in my recollection. From my education and association with persons older than myself, I had been accustomed to reflect, and as a child to reason on what I heard, and immediately I answered,—“ If I have a right to be there, let me go, dear aunt :” but my aunt's manner altered directly, and in a cold and grave tone she said that I misunderstood her ; she meant nothing like what I

imagined; and quickly changed the subject. Later occurrences have often recalled those words to my memory.

‘ When I was in my ninth year, Mrs. Aubrey removed with her domestics to Eton, where I commenced regular study. I had a private tutor, who resided in our house. My aunt’s establishment was not materially altered: we had the same domestics, with the addition of a footman to wait principally on me and my tutor. I had the first masters in every accomplishment, and no expense was spared to give me the education of a gentleman.

‘ The noise and bustle of a public school did not exactly accord with the quiet habits I had imbibed in my forest-home, and I rather shunned the society of the boys. Some, however, would not be repulsed: there were several who good-naturedly strove to form an acquaintance with the shy, reserved boy; and there were others who sought to amuse themselves by quizzing my ignorance of the world, and I was often subjected to their raillery.

“In the name of heaven,” said one of the boys to me one day, after I had replied to various questions, “where have you been educated?”

“Why,” returned an elder one, “you may answer that yourself: he is receiving his education at Eton College, and he is now taking a lesson of politeness.”

“The hint was not taken, and the first boy continued—“Where were you born and nursed?” On my reply a loud laugh ensued.

“In the Forest—New Forest! No wonder he knows so little of the world! Well, my little forester, we will have pity on the ‘wild boy of the woods;’ and now, what is your name?”

“Evelyn.”

“We know that: “Master Evelyn,” as our prig of a tutor announced you: but what other name have you,—John, Thomas, or William?”

“I had never been called by any other name than Evelyn, and, for the first time in my life, I was struck by the singularity;—our servants had all two names; and my companions appeared to have the same number, as the boys

were continually calling them out from one part of the play-ground to the other. Perhaps, dear Laura, you will be amused with my stupidity and ignorance, at not knowing, as the boys said, my own name. A laugh ran round the circle, and, "Here is a boy who don't know his own name!"—was repeated in every variation of tone and manner. My patience was at length exhausted, and I ran home to my aunt, whom I startled with my abrupt demand, and to which she answered,

"Evelyn, my dear, is your name."

"But I have another, aunt?—all the boys at school have two at least, if not more."

"My aunt was not prepared for this question; she coloured, hesitated, and, after a long pause, she replied—"Aubrey is your other name, the same as mine."

"And which comes first, aunt,—which is my Christian name?"

"Evelyn, certainly. I am surprised you should not have known it before!"

‘ The next day my tutor introduced me by the name of Aubrey, which caused some mirth among my companions. When we again met at play, I was congratulated on my increase of knowledge, and recommended not to forget what I had been so many years learning. They were determined, if possible, to keep me from so great a misfortune; for they took especial care to repeat, at every opportunity,—“Master Evelyn Aubrey, take care and remember your name.” This circumstance would scarcely be worth relating, but it brought other reflections to my mind; and, for the first time, it occurred to me as being singular, that I had never heard of father nor mother: my aunt seemed my only relative—the only being on whom I could call for protection,—and she appeared to be unconnected with the world, to stand alone in the scale of creation:—’tis true, she sometimes went to Westwell; but the grand and wealthy owner of that domain never reciprocated visits—my aunt’s were never returned. While we remained at Wood-

and, this never struck me as being at all extraordinary : now that I was able to observe the intimacy that subsisted between the families residing near or at Eton, it did seem rather uncommon ; and one day I questioned my aunt concerning the seclusion in which we lived when at home.

“ We cannot do otherwise,” replied my aunt ;
“ there are no persons to visit at Woodend.”

“ You visit, aunt, at the Park.”

“ I had latterly observed, that whenever I mentioned the Park, there was always a peculiar expression passed over the countenance of my aged relation ;—and when I made this remark, the same undefinable sensation took possession of her features. I cannot describe the effect her manner had on me ; it seemed to say, that I was the point on which her ideas turned ; but yet those ideas were to be secrets—impenetrably so to me. Such was the impression her agitation conveyed to my mind, when I repeated my inquiry,

and she demanded "why I was so particularly anxious at this time?"

"Because," I replied, "the boys are always questioning me respecting my friends and relations."

"But, surely, my dear, it can be nothing to them?"

"They seem to think it everything to them, aunt; and I wish you would tell me who my father was, and his name, that I may be able to satisfy them."

"If they are impertinent, Evelyn, cannot you complain to the masters?"

"And be a tell-tale, aunt?—why I should be tormented out of the school. It will be much easier to tell them at once. So pray, my dear aunt, let me know all the particulars, else," said I, observing she hesitated—"else I shall think the boys are right, when they say I never had a father."

"How dare the boys say so—have they no respect to feeling or good manners?"

“ Indeed, my dear aunt, they never heed manners, nor politeness; and it will make me much more happy and comfortable, if all these questions are answered.”

‘ Although my aunt appeared to have no object in life but my happiness and comfort, yet, in this case, she was impenetrable, and my boyish arguments failed, for the first time, to persuade. However, some new cause for wonder arose in the college, and I was permitted to rest in peace and quietness, with the exception of a few occasional taunts, which diminished as months and years rolled over, and left me the same unknown and mysterious being I have ever been, living almost as secluded at Eton as in our cottage at Woodend.

‘ But this calm was not to continue; a sad interruption to our monotonous life occurred; my poor aunt was taken ill; and though her complaint was lingering and deceitful, yet, from the first, the medical attendants had no hope of her ultimate recovery: she wasted daily, and her de-

clining strength spoke too plainly the sad loss I was to sustain. I seldom left her room, when my duty at school was over, and I felt more keenly and deeply that she was my only friend. Not that I was perfectly sensible of her danger, till it was pointed out by our domestics, and confirmed by herself. One day, when she appeared better, I was contemplating and speaking of her return to health, when she interrupted me, saying, "Do not deceive yourself, my dear Evelyn, I shall never be better in this world; and were it not for your sake, I would not wish it. I have known too much sorrow in my latter years to desire a continuance;—but you, my poor boy, who will protect you when I am gone?"

"But you are better, dear aunt: do not think of these melancholy subjects, and as summer advances, change of air will benefit you greatly:—the doctor said so, and it is fine enough to move; so let us go back to Woodend: there you will soon be well: this large town is enough to make every body ill."

"I shall be thankful if my strength will permit a return to Woodend; for your sake I wish it, Evelyn, most sincerely."

"It will benefit you, dear aunt; else you must not let one thought of me interfere with your comfort and repose."

"If I could only see justice done towards you, my dear boy, I should die happy;—but to leave you thus deserted, thus unprotected—this is the pang of death!"

"I wish, dear aunt, now you have alluded to this subject, that you would give me, what I have often requested, some account of my parents? You must have known them; and what reason can there be for this silence respecting what other boys know so well?"

"If I could give you pleasure or satisfaction, my dear Evelyn, you should not ask in vain; but, alas! my information would only create uncertainty, and, perhaps, give you more sorrow than you have ever felt: but we will not speak of this, I am not equal to it at present."

‘ My aunt improved so much in her health that she was permitted to return to Woodend. For a very short time we indulged hope of her perfect restoration; but, like the variation of the weather, so was my aunt’s disorder—vibrating between life and death. Towards autumn a perceptible change occurred for the worse, and my kind relation was visibly sinking.

‘ When we first returned to Woodend, our servant was sent repeatedly with messages to the Park; but, whatever the errand might be, it appeared to have no satisfactory result. My aunt was ever more dejected on the return of Joseph. One day, when I entered her apartment, I found her with trembling hands endeavouring to fold a paper or letter: she was evidently unequal to the trifling exertion: I believe my concern was visible, for she assured me it was not merely weakness, adding—

‘ “ I do not often write letters, Evelyn; it is too painful for me to recollect days and times that have passed away.”

“ Then why, dear aunt, do you attempt it ? ”

“ Because it is my duty.”

“ Then let me fold the paper.”

“ No, I have done it; but you shall write the direction. I feel I can do no more.”

“ I took the paper, and waited for her to say whose name I was to place on it.

“ Our landlord at Westwell, Evelyn.”

“ Sir Edward Meredeth, aunt ? ”

“ Yes, my dear.”

“ I did as I was directed, and the letter was sent to Westwell. Joseph returned with an answer from the housekeeper, that Sir Edward was in London; but the letter should be sent after him. Whether the exertion was too much for my poor aunt, or whether her disorder gained ground, I know not, but she was much worse that night; and at times her reason wandered. Once, when she awoke from a short slumber, she asked if Sir Edward was there? I was alone with her at the time, and I endeavoured to remind her he was in London.

"In London!—Oh, Heaven! then perhaps I shall not see him."

"He will come, no doubt, when he knows how ill you are, aunt; and how much you wish his presence."

"It was very wrong of him to go. Where did you say he was, at Astol? Why did he go there; has there not been sufficient misery from his going to Astol?"

"Astol, my dear aunt," said I; "where is Astol?"

"Where is Astol! Why, Sir Edward—you cannot have forgotten Astol Manor-house. Did you say Mr. Penruddock was coming? I don't wish to see him."

"I now comprehended that her senses were wavering, and I strove to soothe her; but she still rambled; and at times she uttered various names which I had never heard before—"but," said Evelyn, interrupting himself, "I fear I shall tire you, Laura?"

"Oh no, no, pray go on," returned Laur—

"you know not how interested I am: what more did she say of my father; and did she mention my mother? Try, dear Evelyn, and recollect every word—that is," said she, checking herself, "if it is no breach of trust—and—and if it is proper for me to hear." Laura could not forget the dreadful, terrific words she had heard in her father's house.

"There was nothing said that all the world might not hear; but there was much I could not understand. My aunt remained in this state all night—now dozing, then rambling in her speech:—once she called me in rather a louder voice than she had been speaking, as if she was not aware that I was by her side. "I am here, dear aunt," said I.

"I will tell you, Evelyn," she continued, "where you may find your father and mother. Go to the Manor House, they will tell you; but don't ask Sir Edward—whatever you do, don't ask Sir Edward!"

"Sir Edward who, my dear aunt?" I felt

that this moment was the crisis of my fate, and I eagerly listened to hear all connected with my parents.

"— Sir Edward Meredeth. He will never tell—he will never—no, no—you must not expect help from him." Then my aunt's speech lost all coherency. She rambled at intervals about Astol, Sir Edward, and Mr. Penruddock; and once she said, "You'll never learn anywhere else." Much followed that I could not understand. After several hours spent in this state of alternate terror and excitement, she at length grew calmer, and at last sunk into repose; from which she awoke weak, but perfectly collected; and when the doctor visited her, he did not think her materially worse. She was evidently anxious the two next days, and though she said nothing, it was clear she was expecting some answer to her letter. At every movement in the house she looked up, and appeared disappointed when the evening of the second day was passing over, and no message nor letter came from the Park; and once she said,

“ I forget, Evelyn, how long the distance is from Westwell to London, yet I have often been the road ; but I believe my memory fails.”

“ It is somewhere about a hundred miles, aunt.”

“ No more? then I might have had an answer to-day.”

“ Scarcely till to-morrow ; but why are you so anxious ? ”

“ I am not anxious, Evelyn, and I will try to sleep.”

At this moment Laura perceived Lucy beckoning, and deeply as they were interested, yet Evelyn and his companion both rose to attend the summons ; they knew it was near the time that Mr. Penruddock would expect them.

CHAPTER VI.

When without hands she doth thine castles build,
 Seen without eyes, and without feet doth run ;
 When she digests the world, yet is not fill'd ;
 By her own pow'rs these miracles are done.

When she defines, argues, divides, compounds,
 Considers virtue, vice, and general things ;
 And marrying divers principles and grounds,
 Out of their match a true conclusion brings.

THE next morning saw Evelyn and Laura on the same spot, the ' Fairy Mount,' as it was christened one day in sport by Laura, who insisted that the fairies must meet there at certain periods, to form the circles which spread all over the small downy ascent. Many were the marvellous tales related at various times by the youthful group: the young stranger had the largest share of amusement for his auditors; but Laura never listened to any with the intense eagerness that she now attended to Evelyn's own recollections.

"I fear, Evelyn," said she, "that your recital must cause you great pain. You will think me very selfish when I say how much I wish to hear the continuation of your strange history; but still ardently as I desire to hear the remainder, I can and will subdue my curiosity, if the remembrance of the past should give you too much sorrow."

"We will not think of what may cause me uneasiness, if I can give you pleasure."

"I can scarcely feel pleasure at so mournful a tale, but the interest your story has created is indescribable; there must be some connexion between our families, and yet I never heard any of those names you have mentioned, which is singular, as Mrs. Weston speaks of the persons who visited at Astol, in my mother's time, without disguise or reserve."

"Not exactly so, Laura, for I have noticed when you or Lucy have been questioning her respecting former times, she will suddenly break off, or turn the conversation; and though she

is apparently all openness and candour, yet there are subjects from which she recoils. I might not, perhaps, have noticed this, if my poor aunt had not been similarly situated: they had each something to conceal, and that concealment had some tendency to events in which we are now concerned."

"It must be so," said Laura, musing, "and you are right, Evelyn. But now, will you continue?"

"I think I left off where my aunt was anxiously expecting a communication from Weirwell; she certainly calculated more according to her wish than to probability, and I endeavoured to lead her mind from the subject: in some measure I succeeded, and she was more composed than she had been since she sent the letter. We were preparing to retire, and I, having been up great part of the previous night, was about to resign my place to my aunt's aged female domestic, when we were suddenly startled by the tread of a horse's feet approaching our dwelling. "There is Sir Edward!" exclaimed

my aunt, and in a very few moments Joseph entered to confirm her expectation. He spoke in a low tone to Collins.

“Is it Sir Edward?” demanded my aunt.

“Yes, Madam,” returned Collins, “but are you able to see him? to-morrow you will be refreshed, after a night’s sleep.”

“I may never wake again. I must see Sir Edward Meredith to-night. Evelyn, my dear boy, wait down stairs, and if I am able I will see you again before I sleep—before, perhaps, I sleep my last sleep.”

I obeyed my aunt, and descended to our small drawing-room. where I found a stranger pacing the room with quick and hasty strides; I concluded it was Sir Edward, and not expecting to find him there, I was going to retire, when he called, asking if Mrs. Aubrey could see him?

“She will see you presently, Sir. Collins will inform you when she is ready. My aunt has been wishing much to see you, Sir Edward.”

Sir Edward paid no attention to my re-

mark, but taking me by the arm, he led me to the lights, and gazing earnestly in my face, he demanded my name.

"Evelyn," was my reply; "I am nephew to Mrs. Aubrey."

"And what else, boy?" said he in a stern and fierce voice.

"What else! I know not, I am sure, what else; I wish I did know. You, Sir Edward, can perhaps inform me what else, or who else I am; I shall be much obliged if you can?"

"Obliged to me! What mean you, boy?"

"I am sure, Sir, I do not know. I mean nothing that can offend; but if you are also ignorant, it is needless to expect information."

"Sir Edward took no notice of my words; he continued to pace the apartment in great agitation, till Collins summoned him to my aunt's chamber. I know not what took place, but the conference was a long one; and when he departed I heard him say to Joseph that he would be there again early in the morning,

mark, but
the light-
demanded

“ Ex-

Mrs. Au-

“ At

and fierce

“ W-

else ; I

can per-

am ; I-

“ O-

“ I

nothing

ignorant

“ Sir

continu-

tion, til

chamber

the co-

depart-

would

lated to win my confidence, nor to induce me to seek his friendship; and yet there was something about him that was both interesting and imposing. I had never seen a person so handsome, nor, altogether, so graceful and dignified in appearance.

Two days my poor aunt lingered. Sir Edward did not again leave Woodend; a bed was prepared for him, and great part of his time was spent by my aunt's couch: this gave me pain, for I was not allowed to enter her chamber when Sir Edward was in it. But this sad scene was to end; my kind friend grew weaker and weaker. Sir Edward would have had all the medical persons in the county, if the time had permitted. Alas! their aid and skill were unavailing, and my poor aunt gave too certain indication that her end was approaching. Towards the evening of the third day from the arrival of Sir Edward, the hand of death was on my only friend. I was sent for, and I was dreadfully shocked at the alteration a few hours had made; she was evi-

dently dying ; but calm, rational, and collected, she appeared to wait with hope and comfort for the last mortal struggle. As I entered the room she attempted to raise her hand, the effort was painful, but at length she succeeded, when, with faltering accents, she said,—“ My poor Evelyn, grieve not for me, nor for yourself,—you will have a protector when I am gone. Dear Edward, you will guard this poor boy, will you not ? You have promised, and a promise to a dying woman you will keep, will you not, dearest Edward ? ”

‘ Sir Edward did not speak, he was evidently overpowered by his feelings. My aunt with difficulty extended her hand towards him, he placed it in his, she then took mine and laid it on Sir Edward’s ; he made no movement of accepting the guardianship, which I imagined she meant to press on him. His hand, though joined to mine, gave no sign of friendship, it appeared to have no power to close on the one offered to its acceptance. The poor invalid

noticed the coldness of his manner,—a tear stole down her cheek, while she feebly and mournfully said—"I never thought that you would plant the sting of death;—this moment you could make a moment of bliss, and you refuse me;—you refuse one who has studied your good, your happiness through life. Edward, you are unjust, as well as unkind; but heaven bless and forgive you as I do, and as this poor boy will do also; it is a small boon I ask, and on my death-bed I am refused."

"Oh, no! no!" exclaimed Sir Edward, with a burst of grief, as he threw himself on his knees by her side,—“Whatever you desire shall be done.” As he spoke he took the hand she had placed in his, and pressed it fervently; then he caught me in his arms and wept, even as you do now, dear Laura—but I will leave the remainder for some other time, you are too much agitated.’

“No, pray go on,” sobbed the weeping girl.
“I cannot rest till I have heard the whole.”

“ And you will protect him, Edward ?” asked my aunt.

“ With my life !” said he fervently, and again he pressed me in his arms. My poor aunt smiled, and again the tears fell down her pale and wasted cheek. In a low and trembling voice she murmured—“ It is joy once more ! Heaven bless you, dearest Edward ! Heaven bless you both !” and holding both our hands close together, she closed her eyes, and a gentle pressure gave the only sign when her pure spirit departed.

Evelyn paused a few moments to allow his own and Laura’s agitation to subside, when he continued.

“ Sir Edward was more composed when all was over ; but again he pressed me to his heart, and assured me of his protection. “ Weep not so bitterly, my poor boy,” said he ; “ as far as I can prevent it, you shall never know the loss of this kind friend. I now renew the promise I made to your aunt, and may heaven desert me, if I desert you !”

Sir Edward remained at Woodend till the funeral was over: there were papers which appeared to require his full attention. Occasionally he went to Westwell, but his absence was brief, and though we were not much together, still when we did meet, his manner was kind and gentlemanly. The evening before the remains of my poor aunt were taken to their last home, Sir Edward asked if I should be ready to leave Woodend the next day. I was surprised at the question, which I answered in the affirmative. I waited some time to see if Sir Edward had any instruction, but he remaining silent, I was leaving the room, when he called me back, saying, "I wish to make a few inquiries respecting my poor friend, Mr. Evelyn." From the time of my aunt's death Sir Edward's manner had gradually lost some of its kind familiarity; and though perfectly polite and friendly, there was not that deep feeling expressed. It was foolish to expect a continuance of feeling which was only exhibited in a moment of great excitement.

but I did form such an idea, and my disappointment was great in proportion;—from “my dear boy,” the change was imperceptible to “Mr. Evelyn.” Sir Edward’s questions were of a comprehensive kind, commencing with my earliest years. Had I not known to the contrary, I should have imagined my aunt was an utter stranger to him: his first demand was if I had always lived at Woodend.

“Always, Sir; except the time we were at Eton.”

“Did Mrs. Aubrey ever keep any society?”

“Never. I supposed you must have known she never did, Sir Edward.”

‘He paid no attention to my remark, but continued, “While you were at Eton did your aunt maintain the same seclusion?”

“Exactly.”

“By what name were you entered at Eton?”

“I wish I knew. But I was called Evelyn, till the boys demanded my other name, when I had none to give them. But you, Sir Edward,

can perhaps tell what name my father bore, and my mother! Oh, if you could give me some information of them!"

"I," said Sir Edward, hastily, and walking rapidly across the room; then stopping short, he said "Did Mrs. Aubrey never satisfy your curiosity?"

"Never. I have often endeavoured to persuade her, but could not succeed."

"Then you are ignorant of every particular respecting yourself?"

"Most completely so; and think, Sir, how forlorn is my situation, except yourself, without one friend in the world, without one being from whom I can claim assistance; you, Sir, till this last week have been a total stranger, and you are the only person to whom I can look for advice or protection; can you not feel for one so completely alone, and tell me if I have connexion with any of my fellow-beings? How often have I envied the boys at school who spoke of their fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters! I had

none,—no one ever called me brother nor son; no kind arms were ever thrown round my neck—no mother's kiss was ever printed on my cheek!"

'The recollection of the affection I had so often witnessed when the boys at Eton met their friends, and the fond caresses that could neither be restrained nor concealed, even in the halls and passages of the college, overcame me, and I wept bitterly. When I recovered from my first emotion, I was surprised to find Sir Edward was not much more composed than myself, though he was evidently struggling to suppress his feelings. Notwithstanding my own sorrow, I felt additional pangs when I witnessed the grief displayed by Sir Edward. We both remained some time silent, at length my companion, making an effort, said, "You may be perfectly easy respecting your worldly concerns, your aunt has provided for you. I cannot," he continued, with a faltering voice "provide those ties you appear to regret so much, but my house is from

this time yours ; to-morrow we will be in the park, we will there arrange our proceedings."

' The next day we followed the renegade protectress, and wept over her. In the evening I accompanied Sir Edward to Westwell park. The little Woodend was left in the care of Mr. Woodend's servants, and Sir Edward allowed them to enable them to live with comfort.

CHAPTER VIII.

But midst the crowd, the hum, the shock of men,
 To hear, to see, to feel, and to possess,
 And roam along, the world's tired denizen,
 With none who bless us, none whom we can bless ;
 Minions of splendour shrinking from distress !
 None that with kindred consciousness endued,
 If we were not, would seem to smile the less
 Of all that flatter'd, follow'd, sought, or sued,
 This is to be alone:—this, this is solitude !

AND now, dear Laura, if I have not tired you with my long and dreary tale, you shall have the account of what occurred after I left Woodend. It was indeed a change ; we spent a few days at Westwell, and then I accompanied Sir Edward Meredith to his house in town. A private tutor was provided for me, with the best masters that could be procured. Had Sir Edward been my father instead of my guardian, or had I been the heir to his title and estate, there could not have been more expense bestowed, nor more

pains taken with me. Sir Edward himself superintended my education and conduct. I could not do otherwise than love the man who had protected me when I needed protection; but I did not receive affection in return, after the first burst of feeling that broke forth the night Mrs. Aubrey died, and which gradually gave way to care and attention; but it was cold duty, not affection, nor even friendship. Sir Edward's manner said, too plainly, I will do my duty, I will, to the letter of the law, perform my promise; but I will do no more, I cannot give affection: he did not love, he did not even like me; I was forced to acknowledge it, notwithstanding the care and expense bestowed upon me; there was not the kind word, the cordial manner which I had received from my poor aunt.

'I have heard and read of some persons who were miserable if they had not some one on whom to lavish fondness. I know not if such be my disposition, but I did keenly feel the cold-

ness that daily augmented between my benefactor and myself. There were, however, a few, a very few, periods, in which Sir Edward, for a brief space, exhibited some small portion of feeling towards me, recalling to my memory that unhappy day when my first friend was taken from me ;—but I am trying your patience, Laura ?

“ No, indeed,—I pray you will continue, Evelyn.”

‘ Sir Edward Meredith lived in the gay world, and the magnificence of his establishment was equal to his large estates. Of course I did not join in society, being much too young ; but when Sir Edward received company at home, my tutor and I were directed to be present, and I was introduced as the ward of Sir Edward. We remained in the same state nearly three years, till I was within a few months of fifteen, occasionally changing our residence ; sometimes we were in the country,—in the season, always at London ; but we never visited Westwell Park.

This I regretted exceedingly, as I wished much to see my old haunts, the places where my earliest days were passed, and it gave me great pleasure when Sir Edward, one morning at breakfast, told me that he intended passing a few months in Hampshire; and at the same time he informed my tutor that he had a living for him, if he were disposed to settle quietly in life. My tutor's satisfaction was equal to mine; he had long been engaged, and only waited for a competence, to be united to an amiable and accomplished girl. I need scarcely add that Sir Edward's offer was accepted with gratitude and delight.

'The return to my own forest gave me pain and pleasure; there was no longer the kind mistress of Woodend, with whom I had ever been the first person. Her aged attendant also slept beside her lady, the gardener Joseph and his wife still resided at the cottage, but they had not the charm of early reminiscence to soothe my melancholy; they were attendants of

a later date, as I could well remember their arrival at Woodend. Notwithstanding these vacancies in the dwelling I so much loved, still it was a pleasure to be in the neighbourhood; there were the same magnificent trees—the same village—the dells—uplands—the rivulet that flowed so rapidly through the open part of the forest—above all, there was the same blue, beautiful sea in the distance, with its white sails and sparkling waters. I was much too young to think the bustle and grandeur of my residence in town at all equal to the charms I now beheld. Laura, what an egotist and proser I am getting; can you bear to hear all this with patience?’

“ You are seeking compliments now, Evelyn. But just consider my curiosity. You were within a few months of fifteen, and a short time after you were an inmate of my father's house! There must be some very powerful motive to induce you to assume the disguise of a gipsy, and act as the attendant or companion of Mr.

And then again, the allusion of your dwelling, and my father—Pray continue?"

"I fear you will be disappointed; my mysteries have increased, though I have not communicated; but what I know, you shall know."

"On our first arrival at the Park, I was renewing my acquaintances with the gentry of the forest, Sir Edward was in his study with papers, and I saw him, except at meals. One day he produced a small parcel, which he gave me, saying he found it among the effects."

"It is addressed to you, Evelyn; but the long delay will be immaterial."

When we left the dining-room I went to my own apartment, and examined the packet addressed to me. There was first a letter of general advice, and deeply expressive of the writer's affection for me; it appeared to have been written at the commencement of her illness. And there was another which had been traced by a feeble, trembling hand, only a short time, perhaps a few days, before her death. This letter changed the current of my life, ideas, and feelings. It was scarcely intelligible, and seemed the incoherence of intellectual weakness. Still it so accorded with what had occurred between my aunt and myself, that I was induced to give much weight to what I found penned with a trembling hand and wavering recollection. She spoke of me as being greatly injured; called me the victim of cruelty and oppression, but gave no clue as to the oppressor; occasionally she would mention the names of Evelyn and Sir Edward. But amid a mass of contradiction there was one clear and distinct expression:

it was—"My poor Evelyn, if you desire up the mystery of your birth, you must information at Astol Manor House." wild string of unconnected sentences. Then again, there was—" 'Tis false ! prove it false." In another part—"What ful injustice: with wealth, and power you keep him a beggar ! a dependant ?" were many such expressions. Mr. Penru name was not mentioned in the letter, but repeatedly. I was commanded, entreated, implored, for my own sake, and for others, to visit Astol. The letter, though was all to the same purpose, and might have been comprised in a few lines, as the whole port of it was to procure admission to what I now am.'

"And tell me, Evelyn," enquired
"have you met with any information since you have been here, to give weight to the information you then received ?"

'No, indeed—I am as ignorant as

first entered ; but I will relate the sequel of my tale. When I had pondered over every circumstance wherein my aunt had mentioned the name of this dwelling, and when I connected them with this incoherent advice, the result was a most ungovernable desire to gain admission under your roof. Sir Edward went out that evening, and slept at a gentleman's across the county, where he remained a few days. I took the opportunity of viewing the interior of Westwell Mansion, and among some pictures in the private apartments of Sir Edward, I observed one very much resembling Mrs. Aubrey ; there was no servant who had lived long enough at the mansion to give me particular information, any more than that it was the portrait of Lady Mary Stanley.'

"Stanley!" interrupted Laura, "that was my mother's name!"

'Your mother's, Laura! then that appears to give corroboration to Mrs. Aubrey's incoherence.'

"'Tis very strange," observed Laura, "there is certainly some connexion between us, or my father would never have allowed you to remain! But my mother's name was Florence, she could not have been the same," said she, half musing, half speaking.

"The same! Oh, no!" replied Evelyn, "Mrs. Aubrey was seventy-three when she died; even supposing her to be the Lady Mary in Sir Edward's collection, she could never have been your mother."

"Oh, no! I could not suppose she was my mother, she died when I was quite a child; but I am bewildered, Evelyn; there are some things at Astol to cause wonder, as well as at Westwell; but continue, time will perhaps enlighten us."

"I was also struck with the likeness to Sir Edward in Lady Mary, and mentioned it; but the servant who was standing by said, "That Lady much more like you, Sir, than my master." We cannot judge of our own likeness; I had never

been considered like Sir Edward nor Mrs. Aubrey, but she was advanced in years when I remembered her, and this portrait was of a person about thirty.'

'When Sir Edward returned from his visit, I took the opportunity of speaking on the subject of Mrs. Aubrey's last letter. We were sitting after dinner, and Sir Edward had been relating the places where he rested; he had made rather a long journey in a short time. In describing the road through the forest, I asked him if he passed near Astol? Never shall I forget the expression that spread over his countenance,—he was lifting a glass to his mouth,—the wine was spilled on the table, and the glass fell to the ground, broken into numberless pieces.

"You have not hurt yourself, Sir, I hope?"

'He looked at me, but certainly he did not understand what I said. I stooped and began picking the particles of glass that were scattered on the carpet, then rang for the servant to re-

move them, and to wipe the table. Sir Edward neither spoke nor moved, nor was I in the least aware that my question had caused the accident, or the strange expression, which, however, did not strike me so forcibly at that time. When the servant departed, I renewed the conversation, by again asking — “ If he passed by Astol Manor House ? ”

‘ In a voice of thunder, he replied — “ No ! ”

‘ “ What distance is it, Sir, from Westwell Park ? ” said I, surprised at his manner, but never supposing it had reference to my question.

‘ Sir Edward’s searching look appeared to go through me. I now began to fear I had committed some blunder, but of what nature I could not conceive, nor could I refrain from my interrogations. At last, in a tone of voice that I trust I shall never hear again, he said — “ Villain ! and ingrate ! are you seeking to insult me ? ”

‘ “ Insult you, Sir ! you, my benefactor, my

only friend! the only person to whom I can look for protection or aid!"

"If you acknowledge that I have befriended you, wherefore should you seek to tear open a wound which is only just closing? Merciful Heaven, have I more to endure?"

"This was no reextraordinary, as Sir Edward Meredith always gave me the idea of being a completely happy, perhaps, selfish man, without care or sorrow; and how the simple question I had asked could have caused so much emotion was perplexing beyond measure. I was most truly sorry to have given such extreme pain, and I endeavoured to apologize for my unintentional error, stating my ignorance of what had so deeply offended.

"If you are ignorant, Sir, will you be pleased to say why you made the inquiry," said he, with a countenance, voice, and manner so stern and haughty, that it raised my utmost astonishment. Though cold, he had ever been polite, and strictly observant of the civilities of life.

“ May I ask, Mr. Evelyn, why you have been pleased to catechize me ?”

“ To catechize you, Sir ! I know not what you mean, nor can I understand you, Sir Edward !”

“ ‘Tis more than strange that your ignorance should assume a form so dreadfully irritating to my feelings.”

“ Forget, Sir, that I presumed to question, and if you will kindly point out my error, I will endeavour to be more cautious in future.”

“ Forget, boy, would I could ! But you shall not evade my inquiry ; tell me, and tell me directly, what was your motive for interrogating me respecting Astol ?” The word seemed to come from him as if his life’s blood followed it. “ Yes,” he continued, almost with a groan, “ I have said the word again. How many years have passed since I last uttered that hated sound ! I have tried in gaiety, I have sought in dissipation,—in fatigue and danger, I have endeavoured to seek oblivion,—in religion I ha

looked for relief,—but all in vain ; that one word unmans me, and recalls the anguish and misery of the past !”

“ Sir Edward appeared so totally unconscious of my presence, that fearing he would feel additional displeasure at my knowledge of what might fall from him in his agitation, I rose to leave the room, and had just placed my hand on the lock, when he called, in a voice that electrified me, “ Return, if you please, Mr. Evelyn ; we part not till you have explained your present conduct.”

“ I entreat your pardon, Sir Edward, if I have offended ; but believe me, I have nothing to explain, and I am truly penitent for having inadvertently caused you so much pain.”

“ Again I had to endure the scrutinizing glance of my companion ; whether the innocence of my intention was portrayed on my features, I know not, but the extreme sternness of his countenance relaxed, and he remained silent a few moments ; then he filled a goblet of wine



and with a smaller glass, because
refuse. Sir Edward repeated the
without requiring me to do the san

CHAPTER VIII.

*Je suis, dit-on, un orphelin,
Entre les bras de Dieu jetté dès ma naissance,
Et qui de mes parents n'eût jamais connaissance.*

We remained silent and motionless for a considerable space of time: if I were to judge by my feelings, I should say hours. My companion was the first to renew the conversation, which, however, he did not attempt till he had emptied the decanter before him; and I was almost startled, when he abruptly said, "And now, Mr. Evelyn, tell me what you have heard of Astol—Astol Manor House—the seat of Mr. Penruddock."

The words came from between closed lips, with an effort that was apparently prodigious; while, at the same time, he made every syllable twice as long as it would have been if pronounced in his usual manner.

“ I have heard nothing, Sir.”

“ Nothing, Sir !—Then why did you
what you knew would harrow up my soul

“ Sir Edward,” said I, with firmness, “
already said my offence was not intention
I am truly sorry for what has passed.
say no more. If I have offended beyo
giveness, tell me so at once, and I will s
my fate. But do not treat me as an un
unthankful wretch, who has no gratitude
benefits you have bestowed on him !”

Sir Edward regarded me earnestly ;
speech did not appear to increase his ar
the contrary, his voice was rather milder
again spoke.

“ If, Mr. Evelyn, you know nothing,
this particular period, brought the name
to your recollection ?”

“ After what had passed, I concluded n
plan would be to explain all without res
I answered, “ Because Mrs. Aubrey men
in her last illness.”

“ That, Sir, was three years ago : ’tis

it should have slumbered in your recollection till now."

"The packet you gave me before you left Westwell contained a letter which recalled it to my remembrance."

"Have you that letter?"

"It is up stairs, Sir."

"Have you any objection to my seeing it?"

"Not any, Sir."

"Fetch it, then, young man."

I obeyed, and soon returned with the packet. Sir Edward's manner was stern, and, I thought, unfeeling; but it appeared impossible to refuse any demand of his. There was, at times, an imposing grandeur in his demeanour, a haughtiness that would be obeyed. It was totally different from the gentlemanly politeness of his usually cold but attentive courtesy. I could as soon have refused a monarch on his throne as Sir Edward Meredeth, when he questioned me as I had never before been questioned. He took the paper from my hand, and, without speaking,

he read it most attentively, pondering over the sentences, as I could well perceive, for I had also studied it. At length he placed it on the table, and resting his head on his hand, he appeared for some time lost in meditation. Again he abruptly demanded, without apology or circumlocution,

“What was the impression conveyed,” to my mind, “by the perusal of that letter?”

“Only that there was a mystery connected with myself, which might find a solution at——” I hesitated.

“At Astol—go on.”

“I have nothing more to say. It is natural that I should wish for information respecting my birth: as it is, I know neither my name nor my parentage. You, Sir Edward, must allow my situation, in that respect, is not desirable: though I am perfectly sensible of the obligation I am under to you; and I am quite aware of the many advantages I possess in your friendship—” Sir Edward interrupted me—

“ Did you ever make your present demand of Mrs. Aubrey ? ”

“ Often, Sir.”

“ And what did you learn from her ? ”

“ No more than I have from you, Sir. Nothing to ease my mind ; but occasional sentences, that made me even more desirous of knowing what related to myself.”

“ Repeat those sentences.”

“ I endeavoured to recall every word relative to myself, which I had ever heard my aunt utter. Sir Edward moved not, spoke not, but listened with profound attention.

“ When I assured him that I had told him all, he said, in the same stern voice, with a scornful look—“ You, no doubt, give all credit to the intimation, that you have a right to be here—that no one has more right ? ”

“ No indeed, Sir ;—I must be a simpleton to believe that :—if it were so, there could be no question.”

“ True,” said he, with a loud and scornful

laugh. "And now, boy, what do you wish to answer?"

"I thought, Sir, I before said how much I regret what has occurred, and again I intend to forget it."

"I insist on your obedience!"

"I felt compelled to obey."

"Repeat the questions you intended to ask Mr. Evelyn!"

"My first, Sir, was, the distance from here to Astol?"

"Fifteen miles. Go on, Sir."

"Astol Manor, I believe you said, belonged to a Mr. Penruddock?"

"It does, Sir."

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Penruddock?"

"Sir Edward did not immediately reply; his colour varied, now pale, now red, but his voice had even more sternness; and in a louder tone, he answered,

"I am not."

“ I remained silent, hoping this strange scene would be over ; but no, Sir Edward again spoke.

“ “ Go on, young man. You have not satisfied your curiosity. Go on, I say.”

“ “ Were you ever acquainted with him, Sir ? ”

“ “ I was.”

“ I have often wondered at myself since, how I could summon sufficient courage to question the person of whom, even at the time, I stood in the deepest awe :—it was my fate ; I felt compelled to obey him literally, and go on.

“ “ Did you know my mother, Sir Edward ? ”

“ I cannot attempt to describe the voice in which my companion replied in the affirmative. “ And my father, did you know him ? ”

“ “ I once believed I did—but was deceived.”

“ “ Deceived, Sir Edward !—You will not say my father deceived you, or was dishonourable in his conduct ? ”

“ “ Go on, Sir ; it is sufficient that I answer your demands briefly.”

“ “ Are my parents living ? ”

“ You try me indeed—they are.”

“ Thank God!” I exclaimed, clasping my hands in thankfulness and gratitude; while I breathed a silent acknowledgment to Heaven.

“ Tell me, Sir Edward,” said I, “ tell me, I implore you, where I shall find them?”

“ Have you not told me that?” said he, pointing to the letter.

“ Oh, yes—at Astol; but how shall I get acquainted at Astol? Can you, Sir Edward, procure me an introduction?”

“ I procure an introduction to Astol! Just Heaven! What more is there in store for me?”

“ If you were once acquainted, Sir, there will be little difficulty.”

“ Have you finished your interrogation, Mr. Evelyn?”

“ I have, Sir.”

“ Then, if you please, we will retire: to-morrow I will comply with your demand of an introduction to Astol Manor House.”

“ I was beginning to utter my thanks, but Sir

Edward heard them not : taking a lamp from the table, he hastily left the apartment.

‘ The next morning I received a note from my guardian, in which he regretted not being able to comply with my request so soon as he desired, but he intreated my patience for a few days.

‘ A week elapsed, during which time I never saw Sir Edward. At the end of the eighth day he sent for me in the library. I found him as I had been accustomed to see him, cold, calm, and polite. I could not help, even at that moment, considering what a strange personage my companion was. When in the world, he was all life and animation—the first object in all gay society. Alone with me, he was cold and collected ; but neither gay nor social ; and I had seen him stern, contemptuous, and bitterly sarcastic.

“ Be seated, Mr. Evelyn,” said my benefactor. “ I hope you have all the information you require ? ” I bowed my assent. “ Since I last spoke to you, Mr. Evelyn, I have formed the resolution to travel. It is your wish to visit Astol

Manor House. You will have a good opportunity while I am absent. My steward will supply you with every requisite; and if your visit to Mr. Penruddock does not answer your expectation, or if you are not welcome, you can at any time return to Westwell—the servants have orders to obey your commands. But I fear I undertook more than I could perform, when I promised you an introduction to Astol. I have since reflected that my acquaintance might be a bar to your reception. I am informed that the Lord of Astol lives in the most secluded manner, and will not admit visitors; but you, Mr. Evelyn, are a young man of spirit and ingenuity; you will have little difficulty in procuring admission. My people, as I said before, will assist you in every possible way. I would rather this were done without my interference; but a promise is sacred, and must be fulfilled. When you have tried every method, should you despair of success, this," continued he, taking a sealed paper from his desk, "this will open the gates

of Astol ;—but mark me, Sir, and swear to follow my direction. You will not attempt to deliver this paper till all other means have failed. I will answer for your admission when this is given to Mr. Penruddock ; but before I give it, you must take your solemn oath that you will use every endeavour to avoid requiring this document ; and if you succeed, you will return it to me unopened. Will you swear, Mr. Evelyn ?”

“ I will, Sir.” And I took the oath as he required.

“ ’Tis well. And now, young man, we part. If you wish to communicate with me, direct, under cover, to my steward ;—he will supply your wants of every description. You have also free use of this house, to go or come whenever you please. Once more, farewell. I wish you success and happiness.”

“ All this was so unexpected, so strange, that I was perfectly confused. Sir Edward going abroad, I should be quite alone in the world ; and a sinking of the heart came over me. I

could have loved my guardian; nay, I did love him;—but whenever I made an attempt at more than politeness, some studied coldness, some bitter observation, threw me back on myself, and increased the loneliness of my feelings. Edward offered his hand. I took it, mechanically; but a slight pressure given by the hand, which increased to a grasp before he relinquished my hand, overcame my fortitude, and like a child I wept. He looked steadily at me for a moment; then brushed his hand before his eyes; again he gazed earnestly in my face, when, to my great surprise, he threw his arms round me, pressed me with a convulsive grasp on his heart, and then, in a moment, he quitted the room. Before I had recovered my recollection he was far from Westwell Park.

‘ And now, dear Laura, my tale will soon be ended. I tried every method to gain an introduction to your father. I wrote; my letters were returned by Mr. Groves, saying, “Mr. Penruddock never received visitors nor letters.”

I then wrote to Mr. Barwell, and the same result followed. I took a lodging at the nearest village, hoping some lucky chance would enable me to effect my object without using Sir Edward's letter. With every disappointment my desire increased. At last it was uncontrollable, and when, by chance, I heard of the gentlemen who were enacting the part of gipsies, it struck me as a good idea, and that I would adopt it. The steward at Westwell procured me materials, and old Joseph was my fellow gipsy. It was well for my secret that Mr. Rayland did not visit our tent — my aged companion would scarcely have evaded his curiosity. For a month we loitered in the neighbourhood, occasionally varying our place of rest. At last, wearied out with my failures, I determined to seek an introduction to the camp of Mr. Rayland. I was successful in my effort, and fortunately was admitted to their tents the very night your house was attacked. You, Miss Penruddock, know the rest. I have now been nearly two years an inmate of Astol, and——'

"And your motive," inquired Laura, seeing he hesitated—"have you learned——"

"Any account of my parents? I have not. I am as totally ignorant as when I first entered."

"You have not related what occurred when we left you with my father,—are you allowed to mention the particulars of that interview?"

"Your father, dear Laura, was equally agitated, but in a different manner from Sir Edward. No word escaped him, but his countenance told plainly that some powerful feeling had possession of his mind;—when he had perused the letter or document, whichever it might be, he demanded if I were acquainted with the contents. On my reply in the negative, he made a few inquiries respecting my early days, and then he told me, I was welcome to remain at Astol as his guest, but it must be on certain conditions, which should be written down for me. These conditions, which I afterwards received, place me in the same situation, as I

have since learned, with all the other inhabitants of Astol, and which, while residing here, they are bound implicitly and without question to obey. I would have agreed to any stipulation to ensure my reception, or rather my continuance here. But in respect of information I have not advanced one step."

Evelyn, though he spoke the truth, did not speak the whole truth; he did not tell Laura that for many weeks and months he had thought only of her. His feelings, as a child, had been forced beyond the growth of boyhood. Residing entirely with elderly persons, or those much above his own age, he had attained an extreme state of precocity, and his thoughts, words, and actions were above his years.

Since he had been an inmate at Astol his companions were his equals. The influence of beauty, youth, and cheerfulness, had an astonishing effect on his character, and in an inverse ratio, instead of advancing, it threw him back to the natural and healthy state of mind which is

so desirable in early days. At seventeen Evelyn was what he should have been at fifteen. He was happier in the change, and more contented to remain quiet, and await the help of time to elucidate the mystery of his birth. There were periods when he totally forgot there were other persons in the world than himself and Laura Penruddock.

"But tell me," said Laura, before they separated, "did you relate all this to my father?"

"Not quite so circumstantially as I have to you; but I repeated the chief part."

"Have you mentioned it to any other person?"

"I have not. Sir Edward never stipulated concerning secrecy, any further than respecting the sealed paper. Nor did my aunt, Mrs. Aubrey, ever caution me on that point; perhaps she thought the wiser way was not to awaken my curiosity by recommending silence; or, perhaps, she trusted to chance; if so, chance be-

friended her intention; or my own solitary disposition might have some weight. She depended possibly on that. I never felt the least inclination to speak of my infancy to a stranger; nor should I to you, Laura, when I first knew you; but so many months have elapsed without any letter or token from Sir Edward Meredith, that I almost begin to suspect he has quite discarded me;—if so, I know no person to whom I owe obedience; and, alas, I am free to utter what I please. Still, I would not speak of this to the world."

Evelyn's tale caused much reflection in the mind of Laura. That he was connected in some way with her family seemed beyond a doubt;—and Sir Edward Meredith—he was the person whom she remembered so faintly, and whom Mrs. Weston had designated as "Sir Edward;"—but though so much information had been given, it afforded no insight, but rather increased the perplexity of her reminiscences. She did not name them to Evelyn; she felt a repugnance

at so doing, for which she could not while, at the same time, she did not she would be justified in speaking of father and Mrs. Weston kept so secret.

CHAPTER IX.

Thus I talk of dreams
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain phantasy ;
Which is as thin of substance as the air.

DAYS and weeks glided away in the solitude of Astol, without any perceptible change in the inhabitants. Evelyn still sought every opportunity of declaring his love for Laura ; and Laura as uniformly laughed at his romance. She would occasionally endeavour to persuade him that he was wasting his time, and advise him to visit Westwell ;—but Evelyn was so wretched and dejected, at what he called the implied wish for his absence, that Laura forebore the subject, saying one day when they had had a long discussion on the point, “ Well, Evelyn, if you take my good counsel so contrary to what I intend, I must perforce be silent, and not let my wisdom be slighted.”

A few days after, to the surprise of the junior members of the dinner circle, Evelyn did not make his appearance when the second bell rang. A few moments' delay was given by his young hostess. "We will wait till he comes, Lucy," said Laura: "as our guest he is entitled to so much courtesy; and he is so shy, he will feel annoyed at the idea of having delayed our meal."

"That is very kind of you, Miss Penruddock; but, really, Mr. Evelyn should attend to time, particularly when he knows how exact Mr. Penruddock is. I will just look if he is on the lawn."

"And I, Lucy, will step to the library."

But Evelyn was neither in the library nor on the lawn; and his young friends were obliged to join the dinner-table without him. It happened that Mr. Penruddock was more than usually absent that day; and after the first inquiry relative to Evelyn, when Lucy ventured the supposition of his having the head-ache, and might be in his bed-room, he appeared to forget

him and the whole party. The day was warm and close, and Laura had formed the same supposition as Lucy; but before she joined the table, she sent to Evelyn's room,—he was not there. Lucy was not aware of this; but her idea seemed to satisfy the master of the mansion, for nothing more was said on the subject; and when the young ladies retired to the summer-parlour, they were full of wonder respecting the negligence of their companion. They went to the Fairy Mount, searched various parts of the grounds and park, but Evelyn was not in any of those places.

At length they returned to the house, and found Weston just seated in her evening chair, while the servant was arranging the tea-table:—they made inquiry if she had seen Mr. Evelyn.

“No, I have not, my dears. Brenner tells me he was not at dinner.”

“Nor tea either, it seems,” said Lucy. “I hope he is not going to fly off, in the same man-

ner he came;—but, merciful Heaven! to a certain gentleman, and he is sure to appear.

“Thank you, Lucy, for the compo-
returned Evelyn laughing; “but really
ashamed of having been so neglectful of

“You have been a truant indeed,” o-
Laura; “but are you not famished? You
had no dinner; and where have you been

“I am tolerably hungry, but I will manage
with Martha’s cakes,—and, where have I
—why, I have been asleep.”

“Asleep, Mr. Evelyn! why I went in
room myself, when I heard you were not
ner,” said Mrs. Weston.

“You did not find me there, Mrs. V-
I was fast asleep in the park, near our
Mount, just in the shade of the grove,
back of the mount.”

“How very imprudent, Evelyn, you w-
your death. What could make you ac-
silly a manner?”

“The weather, Laura. I was overcon-

the heat, and having once fallen asleep, why, you know well, there was no chance of waking till Nature herself permitted—all was so still and so quiet.”

“Why, yes, we have no sounds to scare slumber; so, that being the case, we must forgive your absence, Evelyn.”

“It will be rather hard, indeed,” said Mrs. Weston, “if you do not, when Mr. Evelyn has lost his dinner,—that is punishment enough for being sleepy.”

“Ah, very true, Mrs. Weston; but he must still play the gallant with us in our evening ramble,—but we will have a tray ordered for you.”

“Do not send for anything substantial, I prefer tea;—and I am quite ready to stay out as long, and ramble as far as you please.”

“You may safely promise that,” observed Lucy, “for look at yonder black cloud; and see, there are some heavy drops. You must prepare to entertain us this evening either with

your book or some new ditty, to beguile the hours."

Evelyn read and sang to amuse his companions;—but he read inattentively, and his singing was false. "I told you," said Laura, "how it would be; you have taken cold, and we shall have the pleasure of nursing you. Take my advice,—go to bed, and by a little attention now, future harm may be prevented."

"Miss Penruddock counsels you well, Mr. Evelyn," observed Mrs. Weston; "let me persuade you to follow her advice. I will order your bed to be warmed, and a basin of hot gruel for you."

"My good Mrs. Weston, hot gruel and a warm bed in July! No, thank you;—but I will comply with your request so far as retiring goes. I do not feel exactly well; I believe the sun may have given me a head-ache; but no warm remedies;—to-morrow I doubt not of being well again, so good night, my kind friends."

The next day Evelyn pronounced himself perfectly well, contrary to the opinion of his companions, who insisted, as he said, on his being dull and out of spirits. In vain Evelyn protested against their decree of remaining still and quiet. He was quite well; they only wanted to punish him. As for being stupid, he was always so; he "never was so bright as Lucy or Miss Penruddock."

"Very true, Evelyn," replied Laura; "but you are not moderately cheerful to-day; you look as mournful and forlorn as if you were on penance:—that you ought to be; but as we have not imposed any penalty for your imprudence——"

"Why, Nature has done it for us," said Lucy, "in the shape of a cold. So, there is a good boy, acknowledge you were very wrong yesterday, and are very stupid to-day; then you shall be left to your own meditation."

"No, Lucy, you often tell me our sex are obstinate and self-willed; though how you came

by your wisdom is rather puzzling to me, seeing you have but a scanty proportion of subjects for studying human nature."

"We," returned Lucy, in a pompous tone,—
"we study from ancient nature, not from the puny lordlings of the present day.

"We scan the tales of Greece and Rome,
And learn how Brutus ruled at home :—"

and then think of Sir Charles Grandison, whom we have got in various dresses and divers colours, all over the house ;—and in records ; let me think—one—two—three. Why, bless me, there are three sets of Sir Charles belonging to Madam Weston alone! She, good lady, doats on the precise Baronet ; and, dear Madam Weston, is it not true that you venerate the stately Don, so much so, that you actually carried a volume to church one Sunday instead of a prayer-book ?"

"For shame, Lucy ; you know it was a mistake ; and I almost believe you put the book on my handkerchief :—as for admiring the manner and dignified behaviour of Sir Charles, every person must approve them."

"But Mr. Rayland and Evelyn both say such stiff formality would not be tolerated in these days;—every thing is reversed, according to their account;—they report, that the ladies are expected to entertain the gentlemen; and, instead of the beau bowing to the belle, it is the belle must bow to the beau."

"My dear Laura, I wonder you can attend to what young gentlemen say,—such nonsense! Mr. Rayland was very kind, and endeavoured to entertain us; but you must not believe all he invented for our amusement. There, you had much better take a walk, than stay and find fault with——"

"Your pattern of propriety, eh Weston?" interrupted Laura; "well, we will go, and release you from your plagues."

Another month passed away; the bright tints of summer were giving way to the richer and more sober hues of autumn, with its deep brown and yellow foliage; the red berries of the hawthorn and mountain ash mingled with the gay

leaves of the sycamore, and the silvery birch waved its elegant branches, the beauty and grace of the forest. In Astol Park, every tree had full space to exhibit its peculiar attribute, whether of grandeur or elegance; and though there were but few to view, yet those few were enthusiastic in their admiration of the majesty and might of these natives of the forest. Many of them had shaded the lawns of Astol for centuries. Numbers had traditional names:—There was the Conqueror's oak—Fitzwarren's elm—the beech of Queen Maud—an ash that had sheltered King Stephen—and a gigantic plane that bore the title of King Charles; for though there was no record to prove that 'the merry monarch' had ever found shelter among the branches of a plane in the New Forest, yet there was nothing to disprove it; and why should not Astol boast the branches of royalty as well as Boscobel? Rufus trees were innumerable; and there was such certain testimony that the arrow rebounded from each of them, that Laura, when a child,

inquired of Mrs. Weston, "how often they had killed poor King William?—it was cruel to kill him so many times." Our young lover's namesake, of sylvan memory, might have questioned the probability of these trees having existed so many centuries; but those who delight in romance heed not probability; and the inmates of Astol bestowed no thought on the longevity of the sylvan world. Each aged trunk had its tradition; every flourishing tree its tale;—it would have grieved many, besides our youthful friends, had these legends been disproved. Innumerable were these wonders of nature, that spread their branches in proud magnificence, while others were even more interesting in decay,—the trunk gnarled and bare, whose scanty branches, and scattered stems springing from one corner of the time-worn bark, seemed as if they mourned, while they spoke strongly of those mystic days when truth and fiction were strangely mingled, and left a mysterious pleasure behind them—a halo of romance—which will scarcely

allow the mind to believe that those days we so fondly decorate with ideal charms, were in reality even like the present hour, without mystery,—without romance. But who would wish the veil of fancy removed?—who would destroy the illusion which the imagination throws over the records of other times—making the broken arch and ruined tower the solace and delight of many a wayward mind?

In contrast to these beauties, there was one group of about twenty firs, planted in regular rows and at an equal distance from each other;—they were perfectly out of place amid the luxuriance of nature, and many a passing wish was uttered for their destruction, particularly by Lucy, who said they always reminded her of Mrs. Weston's prigish baronet, and his yea and nay darling; and she was wont to apply his name to the firs, calling them the "Grandison Group." Mr. Penruddock never destroyed a tree;—his object was to increase, not diminish the barriers that concealed his dwelling; else, pos-

sibly, this gloomy grove would not have been left where it was a conspicuous object from Lucy's bed-chamber ; and Laura had her share of the annoyance, it being also opposite hers ; but, as she told Lucy, it was nearly half a mile from them, and they had so many windows, with the most delightful prospect, they might surely let this poor group remain in peace.

Our youthful trio were taking a late ramble, admiring the varied foliage, and anticipating with regret the time when their evening walks would terminate, when they passed close to an old thorn, which stood in a wild and unfrequented part of the park. It was that delightful time when twilight throws the soft and sober tint, so soothing and refreshing to the mind, after the heat and bustle of the day—" the hour to meditation due." Our young foresters seemed inclined, as they walked slowly towards the ancient hawthorn, not to defraud the hour of its " due." They had been some thirty minutes silent,— a most unusual circumstance,—when Lucy suddenly stopped, saying,

"Where are we rambling—surely, it is time to return?"

"Not yet," replied Evelyn; "the moon will soon be up, and all is so calm, so cool, and so clear, it is really delightful."

"Then come away from this part; I do not like to walk near Edith's Thorn, nor the Grandison Group, after the sun has departed."

"And why not, Lucy, what objection have you to those places?"

"Lucy," said Laura, laughing, "has a hundred objections to many parts of the park; but this thorn has a dreadful,—dreadful character!"

"And why, pray?"

"Why half the trees in the chace are haunted—and this thorn has a worse reputation than its neighbours."

"I thought I had known all the legends of Astol!"

"You know all the legends of Astol!—When you have lived here twenty years, and twenty more to that,—why then you may, perhaps, chance to know one-twentieth part."

"Then," replied Evelyn, laughing heartily, "I may as well rest quiet, and not attempt learning all the forest lore."

"Don't laugh so loud, Mr. Evelyn," said Lucy, with rather a peevish accent; "I am sure there is nothing to laugh at in this wild part,"—and she thought, "your merriment is not altogether natural; it sounds ominously in a bad neighbourhood."

"But do tell me why this tree has such an evil report? I am all curiosity to know."

"You may as well dismiss your curiosity at once, without you wish to share the fate of Mrs. Blue Beard. I cannot think why we stayed out so late!"

"Where is Mr. Barwell to-night, Lucy?" asked Evelyn.

"Mr. Barwell has nothing to do with it."

"With it—with what?"

"I know what you mean," said Lucy, trying to laugh; "you mean to insinuate that I am tired of remaining out because Reuben is not

with us, but Laura knows I do not like this place."

"Lucy has heard all manner of wonderful tales relating to the forest, and more particularly about this thorn."

"You have heard the same, Laura."

"Yes,—but you believe them; I do not."

"I wish you may never have cause to believe them."

"Well, Evelyn shall have the benefit of our knowledge," returned Laura, "and I will tell the tale in your own style, your own words. To begin with the beginning. This is one of the hundred trees that sent back the arrow to kill a tyrant: in the next place, a damsel who loved this same red Rufus of a king, was silly enough to kill herself, out of compliment, and was buried under this very identical tree. I forget where this hunting-loving king was interred, at Winchester, I believe: it would have been much better if they had buried him here beside the lady; it would have saved him some long walks, ~~this~~

ghost I mean, Evelyn. Ah, you may smile, but one of our articles of belief, respecting spirits and such-like beings is, that the lord and lady meet under this tree at certain periods, when, after bewailing their separation, and frightening all the other trees in the park, who you see wisely keep at a respectful distance, they then very coolly 'bid farewell,' and retire—she to her grave under this very tree, and he to Winchester Abbey, or wherever they have deposited his remains, for I am sure I do not know."

"It is useless to interrupt you, Laura, you will tell the tale your own way; but do walk faster."

"Well," continued Laura, "this is not all;—as Rufus was the king of this wide land, forest and all, why the various beings who repose quietly underground, and were killed in any out-of-the-way manner, conceive it their duty to pay their respects at these particular times; so that at stated periods there are merry-makings among the ghostly world."

Evelyn laughed at Laura's recital; but walked silently till they were removed some distance from the dreaded spot, and then she commenced the conversation, saying, "were many great, good, and wise men, who believed in the existence of spirits; was there a king, king Saul,—you will not dispute Evelyn?"

"You are going very far back, Lucy; those times can scarcely be questioned. We will keep to profane history, such as Laura has been relating."

"Then I can bring forward an overwhelming force. Plutarch mentions spirits, and has many a gossip concerning them, no doubt. Julius Cæsar, at Philippi, when the mighty Cæsar visited him a visit. Socrates had a familiar; and some of our old historians speak of them with authority."

"They were monks, bred up in ignorance and superstition."

"Well, then, we'll leave them alone;

was Lord Herbert of Cherbury—he had nothing to do with monks, and, above all, he was a learned man. But to come to modern times,—Lord Lyttleton, Doctor Johnson, and the delightful writer you introduced to Astol, Evelyn, Sir Walter Scott.”

“It is rather taking too much for granted,” said Laura, “to determine that the author of those works believed in ghosts because he wrote about them; they may as well say we believe in them because we talk about them.”

“I can help you to another spectre, Lucy, to help fill your catalogue.”

“Can you,” asked Lucy eagerly,—“one you have seen here?”

Lucy’s companions laughed at the earnestness with which she attended, in the hope, as they said, of listening to a tale of some forest sprite.

“No, Lucy, I have never been so favoured; but Napoleon, they say, had an attendant spirit—a tall, red personage, who ever gave him notice when misfortunes were coming!”

"It would have been more to the purpose," interposed Laura, "if it had helped to drive them away; but we must bid farewell to spectres now we are at the end of our walk." They entered the hall as Laura spoke, and soon after separated for the night.

CHAPTER X.

The wind is up: hark ! how it howls ! methinks
'Till now, I never heard a sound so dreary !
Doors creak and windows clap, and night's foul bird,
Rock'd in the spire, screams loud :
Again ! the screech-owl shrieks ; ungracious sound !
I'll hear no more ; it makes one's blood run chill !

WHEN Laura entered her chamber Lucy followed, saying, " Do not go to bed yet, Laura ; dismiss Margaret, I will be your waiting-maid." The attendant retired, and the youthful maidens seating themselves at an open window remained silent and thoughtful ; when, suddenly, Laura addressed her companion, with the inquiry of why she requested her to sit up longer,—“ Was it only that we might admire the moon ?”

“ Tell me, Laura,” returned Lucy, without heeding her question, “ do you really disbelieve in spectres and supernatural appearances ?”

“ And tell me, Lucy,” replied Laura, laugh-

ing, "did you really take all this trouble to ask so simple a question?"

"I wish, Laura, you would be serious—really I am so."

"Another really!—Why then, really, endeavour to be as serious as you are, and answer—that I really do not. And now I have replied to so momentous a demand, may I enquire, in my turn, what gave rise to this particular query, at this particular season; and if it is out of character,—a lone and ancient mansion, with two would-be heroines, you are simple enough to credit all they hear, and believe all they see?"

"Surely, we may credit what we see," exclaimed Lucy, eagerly, "no one can deny the propriety of that."

"Why, I believe, so far we may trust your eye-sight, but not always. But now, what have you seen? Something worthy of all this preparation."

"And if I have not, Laura, surely

are mysteries enough at Astol to warrant us in giving some weight to the tales we have heard."

"Such as the red Rufus coming from Winchester?"

"I would not grieve you, Laura, by recalling unpleasant recollections, but there appears no other way to gain your attention; you remember the chapel scene. It is two years nearly since we heard those terrific words, and they have never left my memory."

"Nor mine," returned Laura sighing, and speaking in an altered manner, "you have succeeded now, Lucy; I am perfectly serious. That fearful time ever recalls those painful days in my early life, that hang on my memory like a dream, and merely as a dream do they appear. Had it not been for those words in the chapel, possibly they would no longer have borne even the slight semblance of a vision."

"Then you will allow there are some things not to be accounted for, not to be reconciled to reason?"

" 'Twere vain to deny that, Lucy; our very existence is a mystery. Are we not surrounded by wonders? Is not the whole world a wonder,—a mystery,—which the wisest and brightest of our philosophers have failed to elucidate. Our boasted reason falls infinitely short when we endeavour to comprehend only what we now see,—the illuminated sky and the fertile earth! Your wonder, Lucy, must be inferior to these."

" Not to me. At this time I am so occupied with my own marvels, that those of nature are only secondary; but, however, you shall hear.—It may be a month, or more or less, I cannot speak as to time, but if you remember I had a swelled face, which prevented me from sleeping. I was in great pain one night and rose to bathe my cheek, which was hot and inflamed; the cool air was so soothing that I forgot the imprudence of the movement, and placed a chair by the window. The moon was shining directly on that frightful clump of firs, the 'Grandison Group,' and all at once I thou^{gh}t

one of the trees moved; it did not much occupy my attention, and I was thinking of leaving the window, when I saw distinctly a form, which I had supposed a tree, walk out of its place, and pass beyond the limits of the group." Lucy was here interrupted by her companion, who laughed long and heartily; but Lucy recalled her attention by reminding her she would alarm the family.

"Very true, Lucy, Mrs. Weston sleeps near enough to be disturbed. Do not be angry; but really it is quite ridiculous to hear you speak so seriously, because, perhaps, one of the servants, or one of the people at the Grange, or the Lodge, happened to be walking rather later than usual."

"Recollect,—there is no path that way, they must have been walking for pleasure. Is that likely, Laura?"

"Possibly Reuben was lamenting your cruelty; you might have had a quarrel?"

"Or it might have been a stag or a fox," in-

interrupted Lucy, angrily:—"Reuben,—but listen, Laura: this appearance, whatever it was, for at first I could not distinguish, the moon was not so bright as it is now, moved forward, and as it came near, it had decidedly the form and figure of a man."

Laura would not make Lucy again angry, by suggesting the greater probability of supposing it to be Reuben,—she kept her opinion to herself, while Lucy proceeded in her recital.

"The figure came nearer, much nearer, till there could be no question as to its being a man; when suddenly it stopped and seemed to deliberate, then turned and walked in the contrary direction, till at length it reached the hall-thorn,—'Edith's Thorn.' I thought as you do, that it was one of the family, when suddenly, I am sure there must be some mystery in it,—there were two!"

Laura could not prevent her mirth from again being audible. "Why, Lucy, your ghosts increase like Falstaff's buckram men, or men in

am suits; I trust they did not multiply in me ratio?"

"No, Miss Penruddock, they did not."

"Ira bit her lip to avoid giving further aid, while Lucy continued.

"They remained some time, and then I grew tired of looking, and left the window."

"That was wise at last, Lucy; with your pale face, you were very imprudent in remaining out of your warm bed so long; and so the fair concluded? But forgive me, Lucy, for staring at your wonderful tale, which is attended, as I suppose the walk did of those strollers. Had it been when the gipsy was by the 'Keeper's Luck,' it would have been easily accounted for. You saw none of R—— hem! you saw those personages more?"

"No more that night."

"Then you have seen them again?"

"Repeatedly," was the reply.

"Indeed, Lucy!"

"Aye, indeed, Laura!"

Laura was now what her companion gave her all attention, and ready to credit Lucy's information. She believed that Lucy might be deceived once she could imagine a repetition of occurrence without some foundation. This impression she listened to all variations as to what she saw, and imagined she saw; her creative work, and wild and marvellous from the prolific stores of Lucy's legends.

"Could you form any idea, Lucy, of either of the persons? Did it ever occur to you that it might be my father? We know he is a bad sleeper, and he has been in the garden at night."

"That is exactly what I thought of. I never mentioned it before. I was feeling the wonder of the thing, that it might be chance, or being in a wakeful m

perhaps, again led me to the window,—you know, Laura, I have my full proportion of that virtue."

"You need not remind me of that," interrupted Laura,—“on with your tale.”

“Well, while I was saying to myself, it must be Mr. Penruddock, who should I see but Mr. Penruddock himself walk slowly across the lawn, and enter the house by the door of his own private study; there was your father close under that porch, and the figure was standing by yonder clump of trees.”

“My father might have been the other person,—you said there were two?”

“No; I soon after saw the other, and you will laugh again, Laura,—but that other person was a woman.”

“A woman!”

“Yes, a woman.”

“But does not that explain the whole affair? it was some love-meeting; very imprudent, no doubt, but it takes away from the mystery.”

"But just think," said Lucy, who was very unwilling to relinquish her marvel, "just consider,—is there a woman in this house likely to meet clandestinely, or wander at midnight?—Margaret, you will allow, is too old,—and Martha and the others,—why there is not a female on the domain under forty."

"But at the Grange, Lucy?"

"I inquired, and they are all the same. I do not believe there is a female within five miles whose age does not double ours. Now, is it probable that middle-aged persons should wander about at night, for several hours? Answer that, Laura," said Lucy, triumphantly.

"Well, I must confess there is some reason in what you say; but when I acknowledge that, it takes away from the probability of the affair altogether, and I feel inclined to doubt your eye-sight."

"In that case there is no more to be said. But if I should again view the same appearance shall I call you to witness it also?"

Laura agreed to Lucy's proposition, and they soon after separated, Miss Penruddock to her couch, and Lucy to watch by the window. She was determined to prove, if possible, to her young companion that her information was correct.

Lucy took her station at the window: insensibly she fell into a train of argument respecting her faith in the fact she had so strenuously asserted to Laura; recalling all her potent proofs of the existence of supernatural beings, and Lucy, to her great surprise, found she did not give the implicit credit she believed she did. Lucy was not the first person who has argued against conviction. As she sat by the window without interruption or abstraction, Reason combated the point with Credulity; and, as it ever will be where there are no outward circumstances to bias, Reason was the conqueror, and Lucy felt ashamed of her simplicity. She at length determined to retire to her couch, when casting a parting glance at the stately group

of trees, she perceived both the mysterious beings moving with their usual slow pace; in a moment all Lucy's faith returned, and rising quickly she went to Laura, who was in her first half-waking, half-sleeping daze. Lucy touched her, saying—

“Laura, are you awake?”

“No, I am fast asleep,” was the answer, as Laura drew the clothes closer, and gave herself up to the restorer of nature—“a balmy sleep.”

But Lucy was not to be baffled, she gently shook her friend.

“What can you want, Lucy? Do let me sleep.”

“You shall, presently, but wake now; there are both the persons, whatever or whoever they are, under the ‘Grandison Group.’”

Laura was now as much awake as her companion, and, rising hastily, she was in a short time with Lucy at her window, where she beheld, as Lucy reported, two persons, who were walking slowly near the clump of trees; the

moon shone out brightly, and Laura needed not Lucy's asseverations to convince her that one of the pair was a female. Long did they walk, and as long did our youthful maidens remain attentive spectators; but the distance was too great to allow them to do more than witness.

“ Did you ever, Lucy, remain till they left ? ”

“ No, they never appear in a hurry, and I always got sleepy before they were tired; and now you are satisfied that I have not been romancing, why I shall be satisfied also, and, to speak truth, I am very sleepy,” said Lucy, yawning, as she wished her friend “ good night,” and then retired.

Laura remained some few minutes longer, pondering on the singularity of the circumstance, though she had not the slightest idea of the reality of supernatural visitants; yet there had been sufficient marvels at Astol for her to know there were perplexities and events most wonderful. Though she endeavoured to repress

the somewhat inquisitive disposition of her friend, yet she was compelled to admit there was more than sufficient to create and nourish curiosity. Their total seclusion—her father's dejection—Mrs. Weston's caution—Margaret's reserve—were the effects of some powerful cause, which might never be developed; but it must be important to justify such material change in a family that had once lived according to its station. She had become more convinced of this since the introduction of Walter Rayland: he frequently spoke of his sister, and described the gay circle in which she moved; what a contrast to hers! not that she envied the lively Flora, she rather pitied the unceasing round of turmoil, as the succession of balls, routs, and dinners seemed to her. Laura was quite certain she could never like a life of this description, and Evelyn's report did not render the picture more attractive; on the contrary, the little he had seen of fashion had been under the influence of sorrow and disappointment,—grief for the loss of his

only friend, and disgust for what he conceived the heartless conduct of Sir Edward, who had promised Mrs. Aubrey to make the happiness of Evelyn his first care. And how had that promise been kept? Many would answer, to the very letter of the law: every attention was paid to his comfort, and every indulgence that affluence could procure was at his command; but, as Edie said to Miss Wardour—"but trow ye that Sir Arthur's command could forbid the gibe o' the tongue or the blink o' the ee, or gar them gie me my food wi the look o' kindness that gars it digest sae weel." So it was with Evelyn; the look of kindness was wanting, and the sensitive boy felt keenly the loss. With such feelings it was not likely that he should give a pleasing picture of the world to the heiress of Penruddock; and Laura rejoiced at the little probability there was of her ever witnessing what Evelyn portrayed as noise, bustle, and deceit.

"I wonder," she thought, "how Mr. Ray-

land can live in such a scene of hollow littleness, where, Evelyn says, neither man nor woman ever speak what they think, or act according to their desire. The routine of fashionable life, as he describes it, must be a most insipid, heartless existence."

While these ideas, so foreign to the moment, passed over the mind of Laura, she still remained at the open casement, when her attention was suddenly arrested by perceiving that one of the persons was no longer visible. She had been so deeply engrossed by her own reflections, that it was very possible for the intruder to pass away without her knowledge.

The remaining person came forward in the direction of the Manor House,—it must be an inhabitant. Laura's curiosity was now as strongly excited as even Lucy could desire, and her floating reflections sunk before the anxiety this new occurrence created. Was it possible that another attack might be made on the Manor House? This was merely a momentary thought.

There were only two persons ; and had plunder been the intent, they would neither have delayed it so long, nor have met so openly and so regularly. She was even more convinced it was not her father—her dear father ! Oh, if she could devise some plan to win him from his abstraction,—to restore him to comfort, if not happiness,—to induce him to forego his solitary habits and join their domestic circle, that would be bliss ! Laura's meditations did not prevent her from watching the person who gradually but slowly approached. It was not her father, that was certain. Then who could it be ? The servants were steady, quiet, middle-aged men ; it was most improbable that they should either wander about the park for pleasure, or make appointments. As she still intently gazed on the figure, she felt almost certain that the midnight rambler was her father's guest, the young Evelyn. Yes, it certainly was him, the moon shone full on his face. Then who could the female be ? Evelyn never left the Manor

House, he had never been outside the palings since he first entered Astol as companion of Walter Rayland. Laura till she saw him enter the house, and retired to wonder, but not to sleep.

CHAPTER XII.

Geve place, ye lovers, here before,
 That spent your bostes and bragges in vain,
 My ladies beawty passeth more
 The best of yours, I dare well sayen,
 Than doth the sunne the candle light,
 Or brightest day the darkest night.

It is some considerable time since we took leave of Walter Rayland, who commenced his journey, sorrowful indeed and disappointed, but not without hope. They say "Love is blind." It may be so; but Walter Rayland was not: and his eyes, like Hope's, "told him a flattering tale." He was no coxcomb, no imp of conceit;—but yet he could not help believing that he was not quite indifferent to Laura Penruddock. He had been an attentive observer of female manœuvres and female coquetry; and he would not allow that, in his own case, he was mistaken. Laura was very young: perhaps Mr. Penruddock was

right, when he objected, on the plea of incompetence, to decide. There was nothing to prevent a renewal of the acquaintance when he returned;—but Fear whispered, Laura might be wooed by some other while he was absent—the heiress of Astol Manor must have suitors in abundance. While Walter was listening to Fear, Hope took up the word. Mr. Penruddock had some weighty reason for shunning mankind, and this reason might, and most probably would, continue in force till Walter returned from abroad. When Fear talked loudly of the knights and lordlings who might also seek admittance at Astol, Hope gently hinted at the timid glance, which was quickly followed by a blush, and sometimes a half-laugh. Without being very presumptuous, Walter found consolation and encouragement, and left England in tolerable spirits, looking forward with hope and confidence to the renewal of his intimacy at Astol. What a soother! what a deceiver! what a real friend is Hope! From the lowest station to the high-

est, all woo its influence and own its power—all have mourned its delusion—all have received comfort from its influence.

Walter Rayland gave divers instructions to his sister, previous to his departure, to send him word if she heard the slightest intelligence respecting Astol, and if ever Laura should come to London.

"I will send an express directly; you may depend on me, Walter; and as she is your flame I will forgive her uncouth name—Pen——"

"Now pray, Flora, don't ring your ridiculous changes on a name, quite as agreeable and not longer than your own. I am sure I wonder you ever mustered resolution to marry a long-winded Cornish name."

"Well, Walter, as you desire it, I will not ring the changes on the Tres and the Pens. It is Walter Scott, your half-namesake, who says,

"By Tre, Pol, and Pen,
You may know the Cornish men."

"Well, then, let Tre, Pol, and Pen, rest now,

while you attend to your brother. you hear of the inhabitants of Astor town—when they do come—they noise."

"They need not do that, their is sufficient."

"Mrs. Trevallian, I wish you would"

"I am all attention, Mr. Walter"

"Whenever you hear of Laura's send letters to every possible place."

"On the earth and under the ea"

"To be sure, everywhere," said hastily.

"I fear, Walter," said Flora, shall have some difficulty in finding for the underground part of the bus"

"Nonsense. And as you attend est in this affair, you will be rewarded."

"Thank you for nothing, kind own are all settled."

"They may be unsettled, Flora ;

discord between you. I'll make an Othello of Trevallian."

"Mercy—mercy! I'll promise anything to save my breath. So, my very gentle-minded Walter, behold, I will do thy bidding."

"Now you speak like a sensible girl."

"Matron, if you please. I have been married two months."

"Marriage has not given you one jot of gravity to entitle you to the dignity of matron."

"Ah, well, time may do it."

"After all," said Walter, affectionately, "I believe you are very well as you are. So, good bye, my dear Flora, and remember my request."

Walter proceeded by Ostend through Germany and Switzerland, satisfying his friends at home, as Flora wrote him word, by his long letters, that he was usefully and profitably employing both his money and his time; but lamenting, however, that she had no intelligence for him respecting Miss Pen——, as she very irreverently termed Walter's divinity.

On arriving at Rome, he found so much to amuse and interest, that he determined on passing the winter in the Queen of Cities. He was introduced to the gay world, and having plenty of money, a handsome person, and lively manners, he soon became a general favourite, and was much sought after. Rome was very full of English at this particular period, and all were inclined to sociality. Diversions of every description followed in rapid succession, and the gay Englishman was a welcome guest both with natives and foreigners. One evening at a ball, he was questioned respecting his progress in the way of seeing sights, when he mentioned his intention of visiting the Coliseum the next day. Some of the company present proposed his joining a party that had been formed some days previous. He would rather have declined the invitation, but as they made a point of introducing him, as they said, in glory to the old building, he could not well refuse; else it would have been far preferable to have gone alone. How-

ever, he consoled himself with the idea that he should have plenty of time afterwards to visit it in solitude, and he was ready when the party assembled at the place appointed.

They were a large and merry group, many of them strangers to Rayland; all were polite and attentive, and appeared to consider him the hero of the day. This, at any other time, would have been far from displeasing; but having some little love for the sublime, he felt it would be more imposing to view this stupendous ruin the first time in silence and meditation. The splendid dresses of the ladies, and the mirth of the party, were not in unison with the majestic grandeur of the building. Walter seized an opportunity, when they were busily engaged with the lady who took the lead, to withdraw from the circle, and in wonder and admiration he remained some time lost to all outward sensations. His ideas reverted to the olden days of Rome, when in proud pre-eminence she stood the Queen of the world. Walter was pondering on the Cæsars

the Catos, and the ancient worthies of the Great City, when he was startled by a voice at his elbow: turning quickly round, he perceived a man in the costume of the country: he seemed waiting for an answer.

"Did you speak to me, my friend?" inquired Walter.

"I beg your pardon, Signor; but do you belong to yonder party?"

"Yes," replied Walter, "I do."

"Then perhaps, Signor, you can tell me which is Sir Edward Meredeth?"

"No, indeed—I am not aware that he is in the party."

"He was to have been—you know Sir Edward, Signor?"

"No, I am not acquainted with him. I know there is such a person, but that is all."

"Then perhaps, Signor, he is with that party?"

"If so, I should have heard the name; but you can inquire; they will inform you."

"No, thank you, Signor; if, as you say, he had been there, you must have known him."

"Still you may learn where to find him."

The man declined taking Walter's advice, and departed. When Walter again joined the company, he mentioned what the man had said, and in reply one of the gentlemen informed him, that Sir Edward Meredith was to have been their companion, but he sent an excuse early in the morning, having just received letters from England which required an immediate answer.

Notwithstanding Walter Rayland's love and deep devotion to the amiable, interesting, and sensible Laura Penruddock, he was still amused by the varied groups of females that he daily encountered;—they were of all sorts,—beautiful and plain—sensible and triflers—coquettes and prudes;—but every comparison ended to the advantage of the Astol maiden, which, as Walter very sagely decided, must be the consequence of her secluded education. There was nothing like retirement to develop the female character; and

yet, had he been questioned, he would have declared his sister Flora to be only inferior to Laura. He knew Flora was kind, open, and amiable: she had been brought up in the world of fashion, and few had partaken of its gaieties than Walter's sister. But she was the pole-star of his affection, the light which was to guide his path in life. Walter's nature was ardent and confiding: he believed, from his observation, that he was not indifferent to her. "Flower of the Forest," as he was wont to call her; and he trusted to her total absorption in the world for that impression not being so. He might not have felt so secure had he been aware of the gipsy-boy. Could he have known the vagrant-lad was his rival, with all the advantages of opportunity, and a disposition to seize every opportunity, and omit no importunity (even from his best friends), with all the attendant elements of mystery, romantic love, and such as might have been rendered to him by a superior nature—had Walter known

he would scarcely have been so free from care, and so willing to allow that Laura was too young. He had a spice of romance in his disposition, and the circumstance of their first meeting, with the assistance he had been able to afford, seemed to connect him with the Astol family, and he trusted time would work all things to his wish; if not, why Walter had also a small portion of philosophy in his composition; it was but a modicum, to be sure, but still enough to make him agree with the poet that "Whatever is, is right." And our hero, under this impression, enjoyed the mirth and gaiety of Rome, ever bearing in mind the prize he hoped to gain, while his conduct was such as, if reported to Mr. Penruddock, would ensure his approbation.

The hours did not exactly fly; they never do with lovers when absent from their mistresses; but they passed rapidly, and Walter found some difficulty in procuring time sufficient to gratify his curiosity with the wonders that surrounded him. He was obliged to seize every opportu-

with the sublime theories of
evening he declined several in
some hours for the survey of
tance from Rome, without be
the remarks of his companion
enjoyment to contemplate the
"olden time," with every cir
tude and twilight, while the so
of a refreshing eve, after a su
and animation to the exhauste
laxed frame. Walter dismiss
felt certain that his local know
him to reach his home when
view of "classic lore."

Seated on a fragment of t
attention was absorbed by the
He rather fancied himself a co

bestowed, he commenced examining whatever might hereafter be of service in the way of astonishing his father, mother, sister, and, he hoped, Laura also, with his wonderful acquirements and correct criticism. Alas! for Walter's knowledge and fame; the very idea of what Laura would think, what Laura might say, drove all these aspirations from his imagination. He was no longer viewing the glories of Rome; his mind had jumped, with the lightning's speed, to the Manor House; instead of recording what was before him, he was recalling Laura's words; instead of viewing masses of architecture, his "mind's eye" was occupied by a young and lovely girl, who, with the mirth of innocence and purity, bounded like an antelope on the brakes of her native forest. Rome and its wonders were forgotten; the increasing shades of evening encouraged the delusion, and the Park at Astol, with its antique building and loved inhabitant, took full possession of his fancy, and created an ideal vision in which he again took his place at

the work-table, and astonished the
the Manor House with his "news,"
as Lucy was wont to call them.
the lawns, with Laura for his com-
listening to his love without unde-
such, imbibed the same sentiment
and unknown.

How long Walter Rayland remained in this dream of paradise perhaps till the chill of night gave place to the rising sun;—or he might have retired to his room sooner:—it is useless to speculate on what cannot be decided. His reverie was interrupted by a firm grasp of the shoulder, and he started up to repel what the instant moment told him was a robber, he found himself surrounded by an armed and numerous party. Walter was naturally brave, perhaps a little too so; but he knew resistance would be fruitless against so many numbers: two or four he might have stood up to, but at least he might have made the best of his time, if there were ten, if not more: it would

to oppose force. Walter regretted that he had few valuables about him, that they might have been satisfied at once without detaining him prisoner, as he had heard was their practice till ransom could be obtained: it was rather bolder than he had conceived possible, to make a capture so near the gates of Rome. He had considered himself in perfect safety, and his surprise was great in proportion. Addressing the person who stood nearest, and who, by the faint light, appeared superior to the rest, he demanded their intention, adding,

“What I have you are welcome to; it is not much indeed, only my watch and some gold pieces——”

“We are not robbers, Signor,” said the man, interrupting him. “It is yourself we want.”

“Indeed!” returned Walter, laughing; “then be so obliging as to say what unknown merit prompts this desire for my company?”

“You will know that, Signor, perhaps, when

we reach the end of our journey. Will you be so kind as to mount this horse?"

"You are extremely polite to provide a horse; pray which way am I to guide it? If quite agreeable, I will direct its course to my lodgings, where I shall be most happy to entertain such worthy cavaliers!"

"No, no, Sir Edward! We have had a long chase after you, and you will not baffle us again."

"Sir Edward!" exclaimed Walter, half disappointed. "Oh! this is some mistake; my name is Walter Rayland; and the utmost honour I can claim is an E-s-q at the end of it."

"I don't understand what you mean, Signor, by an E-s-q; but you deceived my comrade; you must not expect to play the same trick again."

"You are truly perplexing, gentlemen; I really have no recollection either of you or your comrade: nor could I hope to deceive such clear-sighted cavaliers, who have not only taken on themselves the responsibility of granting me

a new baptism, but have likewise accorded me the honour of a baronetcy. Go on, my noble Sirs, perhaps you may end in finding me some higher title—Prince or Duke—I shall make no objection.”

“ You are merry, Sir Edward. But that you always are, if my employer speaks truth.”

“ May I be favoured with the name of your employer ?”

“ No, Signor, that would not be quite in the course of things. Keep your steed by me, if you please, Sir Edward. Now, my comrades, ride on.”

“ Well,” thought Walter, “ this is an adventure indeed ; the worst of it is, it will soon be over ;—the ‘ employer ’ that this man mentions will speedily discover the mistake, and I shall be taken to no lady’s bower, for such I suppose is the end of the adventure ;—but if so, this Sir Edward—Sir Edward !—who, I wonder—possibly the same that man inquired after at the Coliseum—Sir Edward Meredeth. I remember

hearing the name last winter at fashionable parties, but I certainly was never with him in a private circle;—and if my memory of the list of baronets be correct, he cannot be a young man, not sufficiently so for such adventures. For my own part, this is rather amusing, only I perhaps may get deeper in his secrets than Sir Edward will approve. It is very curious that I should be mistaken for one totally unknown to me, and certainly a much older man——” “Pray, my friend,” said Walter, interrupting himself and addressing his companion, “do you know the age of Sir Edward Meredith?”

The man laughed long and heartily; and such is the infectious nature of this amusing convulsion of the body, that Walter laughed as loudly and almost as long, merely at the man’s jocund mirth.

“Well, you are a merry gentleman, Signor,” said the man, when the jest had received ‘honour due,’ “and I am sure I hope no harm will befall you; but I could not help laughing

to see how naturally you asked me about your own age, wanting at the same time to persuade me you were not Sir Edward ;—and how should you have known the other name if you had not been the person we were seeking? I never mentioned the name of Meredeth. You see, Sir, you have betrayed yourself,” said the man, with another laugh at the supposed simplicity of his companion. The party rode on, sometimes speaking of the road, at others laughing at Walter’s occasional inquiries. At length they reached a spot where a carriage was in waiting. Walter did not quite like this mode of conveyance, and when he was civilly requested to enter it, he expressed his wish to be allowed to continue on horseback. This, however, was refused, and as resistance was futile, when in the power of those who had the means of compelling obedience, he at last complied, and entering the carriage it drove off rapidly. Night closed in and found Walter still a prisoner, and proceeding with increased speed: it was perfectly dark,

when they suddenly halted, and the making a short turn, they entered a corridor. A flight of steps led into a large and brightly lighted hall. Walter made no resistance; indeed he was all curiosity to be informed of the motive for this transaction, and, fearing he should be discovered as "thoughtless," he with the eagerness of his disposition followed his conductor from one chamber to another, through corridors and galleries, and at last was shown into a spacious well-furnished library. It was an airy and a sombre room, notwithstanding many endeavours to render it otherwise;—the crimson curtains with gold fringe and tassels, the poles, with mirrors and candelabras in gilded frames; but the dark tapestry, the heavy beams supporting the roof, the scanty light afforded by one massive lamp, with the numerous piles of books, and the family pictures that were hung perhaps with the hope of enlivening—the apartment was so

nature, and art could not relieve it. It was like the flowers and decorations of Père la Chaise—where, amid blooming garlands and flowering shrubs, the heart is sad, even if there be no grief in the visiter. To the gayest sons of mirth, a visit to the tombs is a sedative, and so was this chamber to Walter.

Our hero, after examining the portraits and admiring the outsides of the books, as well as the lamp would permit, at length threw himself on a couch, and began to wish the return of the man who had conducted him to the library. Walter was rather fond of soliloquizing, and with such abundant cause as the present, he did not fail to give way to his usual practice: his thoughts and words were as follow:—"Well, here I am, and here I must remain, till my director returns to enlighten me respecting this adventure; the worst of it is, it is not for me, without my honoured father has procured a baronetcy for his accomplished son;—but even that will not do, my name being Walter. I

have no pretensions to Edward, even as
pendix ; so not for me, oh, not for me,
sweet meeting meant — though this is
a dull and gloomy place for a lady's
it seems to me more like the abode of
choly, than the home of beauty : giving
blue chamber feel, such as the nursery
experienced when searching after her
headless wives. Oh, woman ! woman
mischief has thy chief attribute caused
By-the-bye, though, I have felt the fore-
said quality ;—at Astol I was as regu-
mented as any old woman in the most
country town. Sweet Laura ! now all
feelings will disperse, and your idea will
every faculty. What a blight it would
my prospects, if I were to consider this
tion as final !—but the spirit of hope
strong within me for such unwelcome
to find entrance. No, Walter Raylar
despair ;—and here comes my keeper, to
such an unpleasant climax, even if I
clined to such despondency."

The man entered with refreshments, and Walter, notwithstanding his perplexity, contrived to eat and enjoy a good supper. Still he was disappointed, there was no clue to the enigma; the man laughed at the idea of this being an affair of love.

"There is no lady in the case, I assure you, Sir. This packet, I imagine, will remove all suspicion of that kind."

"A packet for me! Why did you not give it me before?"

"I had my instructions, Sir, which I have obeyed."

"But this packet is not for me, my friend; see, it is directed to Sir Edward Meredith; how strange it is that you will persist in disputing my identity! I tell you once more, I am not Sir Edward Meredith, nor any other Sir Edward. I certainly cannot open a letter which is sealed, and properly directed to another person."

"If that be all, Sir, I will soon arrange that,"

said the man, taking the letter and opening it without any ceremony, "There, Sir, now you can read it or not, at your pleasure. My employer told me that would explain everything."

"And who is your employer?"

"Most probably the paper you hold will tell you that, Sir."

"Well, it seems I must enter into the private concerns of Sir Edward Meredith. I certainly am not gossip enough to feel much pleasure at the circumstance; but if I have any curiosity it will be satisfied, at any rate."

But Walter was mistaken; the mystery was only increased by the perusal of the letter; it was addressed to Sir Edward Meredith, and among others, contained the following lines:—

"At our last conference I did not expect you would so madly accede to the request of a doting boy, who, instigated by a doting woman, believes he knows not what. His ideas, wild and floating, lead him far beyond the truth; nothing but want of reason could have prompted you

introduce him to the notice of those from whom he should have been for ever separated. The rest follows of course, and without you take final steps to prevent the possibility (which can only be by legal measures), this base-born will inherit the lands and wealth of the Meredeths. This, if you recollect, Sir Edward, you were once most anxious to prevent, and now, since your final interview with Mrs. Aubrey, you have wavered. Your promise ought to have no weight, when that promise was to destroy all right, all justice. You have often lamented there being a possibility of the estate not devolving on Frederick, who, poor fellow, has been brought up in the idea of being hereafter rich, and honoured with the rank of his ancestors. You have repeatedly declared you would never acknowledge the claim of Mrs. Aubrey's protégé; and now I must speak plainly,—the weakness of your nature is so great, that you relent after having held out for years. A few hundreds annually would have satisfied an obscure boy; he

would be happy and contented ; while son, bred up in every luxury, and in of a fortune, to which the lands of would have been trifling, has, by the d our sovereign, been reduced to a ver pittance. Think you, Sir Edward, father, can bear to witness his pros troyed? No; if you will not do jus ingly, you must be compelled. I h sought this opportunity ; you are no power, and you must either sign the pa accompanying this, or you will remain for life, and then Frederick will succee at law. And now, Sir Edward, I will two days for consideration: reflect c beseech you, on this subject in the inte you will, I doubt not, act as justice as require."

CHAPTER XIII.

Where fantasy, near hand-maid to the mind,
Sits, and beholds, and doth discern them all ;
Compounds in one, things diff'rent in their kind ;
Compares the black and white, the great and small.

This busy pow'r is working day and night ;
For when the outward senses rest do take,
A thousand dreams, fantastical and light,
With flutt'ring wings do keep her still awake.

WALTER read the letter most attentively, but no light followed, it was all a mist. When his companion again entered the room, Walter explained the increasing perplexity, which was, he said, "bewildering;" that he should be mistaken for one to whom he was absolutely unknown, was strange enough of itself, but when all circumstances were considered, it was even more strange. This Baronet was certainly no boy, and Walter reflected how often his father had mortified him by calling him a very boy; his sister also took delight in the word, and now he

was in durance for one who had lived long enough to witness the growth, and permit the expectations of one "bred up in every luxury." "My travels or my disappointment," said Walter, "may perhaps have written age on my brow, and planted wrinkles where wrinkles ought not to be." This idea made him rise hastily from his chair, and attentively examine his features in one of the numerous mirrors; all was smooth, and would perhaps have been blooming, if the warm sun of Italian skies had not cast a deep shade of brown, which our hero said "certainly added nothing to his age, whatever it might do to his beauty. There were no marks even to show where the hateful crow might hereafter put his foot;" and Walter, after a minute survey, was decidedly of opinion that the countenance he saw before him, was the likeness of one in the very earliest dawn of manhood, with the strength and elasticity belonging to his years. A more extended glance did not diminish the satisfactory

impression. Vanity whispered, in spite of Walter's modest denial, that the form was graceful and manly, while the face, if not decidedly handsome, was not very far from it. "To take me for an old man! well,—we may view things in a different light," and returning to his chair, he repeated—

' Not his the form, nor his the eye,
That youthful maidens wont to fly ;'

forgetting, as the quotation passed his lips, that the lines were written for one who might, perhaps, be about the same age as the gentleman he was compelled to represent.

Walter's movements and ejaculatory remarks were highly amusing to the man who waited patiently the event of our hero's examination; and notwithstanding the respect he evidently felt for the supposed rank of the captive, he could not prevent his laugh being as audible as Rayland's observations were on his personal appearance.

"I am glad to witness so much mirth, my

friend. A merry gaoler speaks well for the captive."

"I hope, Sir," returned the man, "you have no cause to complain of your treatment; my directions are to use all due respect, and to provide in every possible way for your comfort."

"That you have obeyed literally, and so far all is well. I have had a journey, and I suppose I shall have a night's sojourn in this castle, for such it seems to be; but this paper speaks of my being a captive for life; now this is certainly beyond my wish: for a month or so it is immaterial where I spend my days, in Rome, Naples, or here; but after that time my family will be anxious, and it will not add to my comfort to know they are unhappy respecting me."

As Walter Rayland spoke, the man appeared to be debating some subject; whether the repeated denials of his captive began to have weight, or whether he might fear the consequence of committing so great a blunder, is uncertain, but when Walter again reasoned with

him, he did not laugh or seem so confident as he hitherto had been.

"Pray," inquired Walter, after a momentary silence, "what age do you suppose me to be? When I asked the same question respecting Sir Edward, you laughed me to scorn; but let me be whom I may, I must have some outward mark by which to guess whether I have numbered twenty, thirty, or fifty years. How long would you judge I have lived in this very amusing world?"

"About one or two-and-twenty years, Sir."

"You are right. Do you think it possible for any one to suppose me nearly forty?"

"No;—quite impossible."

"Then listen." Walter read several passages in the papers relative to the years that passed since the young man, Frederick, had been allowed to consider himself the heir of Sir Edward Meredith. Walter was careful in selecting those passages which had reference to the time, not to the nature of the demand.

"Now you see by these papers, that Sir Edward Meredith is supposed to be the father of a son, who has experienced vicissitudes, and cannot, if we understand these papers correctly, be very young, even as a boy. Does not this accord with my assertion that you are mistaken?"

The man pondered, rubbed his forehead, and was evidently perplexed.

"You'll never make a middle-aged man of me," said Walter, laughing, "and I am nearly certain that the veritable Sir Edward is on the wrong side of forty; it strikes me I have seen among the records of that most respectable order of gentility, the full and particular account of the marriage of Sir Edward, only when, where, and to whom, I must plead ignorant. I know," he continued still laughing, "my evidence would not be termed very conclusive in a court of law, but it is true for all that, and when I get into an English library I will copy the item, and send it to you, my friend."

"There are plenty of English books, Sir, in that compartment," said the man, pointing to one side of the room.

"This will do," exclaimed Walter, "here is the very book. A full and correct list of all the baronets of Great Britain, Scotland, and Ireland; and here is Sir Edward Meredeth, born 18th May, 17—; at this present time he is past thirty-nine years of age; married the 4th of August, —; I was nearly six years old at that time;—a son born 18—, just seven years younger than myself. Now, Signor Governor, what do you say to that?"

"I cannot read English, Sir; there would be small converse between us if you were not a good Italian scholar; but there is a person in the castle who understands the language well; if you will spare me the book I will make inquiry of him." As the man spoke, he took the book from Walter's hand, and left the room.

"That is civil," said Walter; "he makes no ceremony of telling me my word is not suffi-

cient. Spirit of the Raylands, hear that! Oh, my proud ancestors, who stalked in armour and buckram! Is not this more than enough to raise ye from your leaden couches and stony drapery, to punish the caitiff who dares question the veracity of a Rayland? Arise and vindicate your insulted name; and in the mean while I will finish my supper;—by Jove it is not a bad one."

The "Governor," as Walter styled him, did not return. When the refreshments were removed the chief attendant shook his head when Walter spoke, intimating that he could not understand. Our hero was conducted to a sumptuous bed, where he slept long and soundly. After his first meal the "Governor" again entered the apartment, with the Baronetage in his hand.

"Well, my friend," said Walter, "have you decided whether I look old enough to be the father of a son in his sixteenth year?"

"Why, Sir, I begin to think there must

some mistake, though how, I cannot say. Sir Edward Meredith was to have been one of the party to the Coliseum."

"So I heard," replied Walter, "but he received despatches just as he was joining the company; this I learned after."

"And, I suppose, Sir, yours was not a long engagement?"

"It was not."

"Then, perhaps, that explains the mistake; a correct list was made out a considerable time before the appointed day; we neither knew the increase which you made, nor did we hear of Sir Edward's absence. One of our comrades ascertained the names of every gentleman in the party, except yourself, so we naturally concluded you were Sir Edward. The capture was to have taken place that day; by some mistake as to time, it was prevented, and succeeded too well yesterday. Now what to do I know not; our employer is a desperate man, and I fear the result of your being introduced to him."

"Why need I be introduced at all? Give me my liberty, and all will be well; only I tell you this honestly, if I ever meet Sir Edward Meredith I certainly shall acquaint him of the plot against him, and then he may take care of himself."

"I cannot think the worse of you, Sir, for being so candid, and yet it places me in an awkward predicament."

"Is your whole dependence on your employer, in this curious concern?"

"Not exactly. But he was to procure me a commission in some regiment, where I might get an honest livelihood."

"If that be all, I think I can undertake to ensure your being no loser. Will you accept my promise?"

"If you will wait a few hours I will consider what you have said, and you shall know the result."

"Hours! You require time, indeed. In the mean time I suppose I may perambulate this

building; of course it is guarded and well secured, for the reception of so important a personage as myself?"

"The ramparts are open, Sir; this door will lead to them; but there would be no possibility of your leaving without the consent of the porter and guards."

"I have no thought of the kind; I can wait patiently—quite satisfied that my captivity will not last long. My father's son has too many friends in the political world to be long concealed, and if any mischance should occur I shall have a glorious revenge. So now, Sir Governor, to your meditations."

Walter took full advantage of the permission to walk on the battlements, and he was soon satisfied that a more secure retreat could scarcely have been found: situated among the mountains it stood supreme in loneliness: and what was the intention of the builder when it was first erected puzzled Walter; if designed for domestic comfort, the inhabitants must have had strange

ideas of comfort, and must have had time for solitude.

" This would suit Mr. Penruddock Walter. " Had he resided here, he would have had no occasion to destroy roads and to keep travellers from his abode,—not accomplished the needful in this place."

The huge vastness of the building arrested the attention of our hero so completely, that he heeded not the lapse of time. He fell into a train of reflection on the strange event that had brought him to this place; he endeavored to recollect if he had ever met Sir Edward de Vere; he could not recall any certain place where they had been in the same way as was more than probable they had, and determined it should not be long before they were acquainted. He then revolved every circumstance of the last year, and in due time had been well considered, and he began to look for amusement. It was impossible to gaze at even such sublime scenery as was now

before him, without at length tiring—mere beauty will never do; we must have animation; some of the life of Paris or London transferred to these rocks would be a great improvement; so Walter thought, and so have many prospect-hunters thought. It is all delightful for an hour, but without the charm of variety, mere rocks, trees, dells, and waterfalls, be they ever so romantic, can only please for a certain season. Time and daily inspection bring the grand and the simple nearly to a par; nay, it may be questioned, whether, for a residence, a cheerful prospect, even though it be deficient in grandeur, is not more desirable than the wild and picturesque, which, perhaps, has its full share of inconvenience. Walter Rayland's weariness was fast increasing, when, to his great satisfaction, the Governor returned, and informed him that he really believed they had been mistaken when they made him a prisoner.

"And is this the result of your long consultation? I thought you had made that discovery

before. Pray, shall you take another four hours to decide on what is to follow this conclusion?"

"Why no, Sir, we have decided."

"It rejoices me to hear you say so. And may I inquire how your decision affects me?"

"That you will engage to protect us, if it should be discovered that we committed this blunder; and that you will not mention having seen the papers intended for Sir Edward."

"I will not, without it be to Sir Edward himself. But I will not allow a countryman to be entrapped into this place if I can prevent it."

The man remained some time in thought; at length he said, "Will you give me a written promise that, in the event of my requiring protection, you will give or procure it?"

"As far as my power extends."

The man again meditated: to keep Walter would only be to ruin himself completely with his employer. The man was needy, but no villain; and it never once occurred to him that Walter might be removed by means which would prevent all

discovery; and, besides, the frank good humour of Walter had created a feeling of fellowship, which would not, perhaps, have gratified the proud blood of the Raylands, had this interest been proclaimed. On the whole, it appeared to the man that it might be more to his advantage as matters stood, to side with the captive, and accordingly he got Walter to sign a paper, promising to aid him if required. When this was all arranged, preparations were made for their departure, and before the next morning Walter was again an inhabitant of his own lodging at Rome.

After satisfying the curiosity expressed in the countenance of his servant, as to his long absence, and while seated at his breakfast, he felt something very like disappointment at the conclusion of the affair. "After expecting to be the hero of a romance, to have things turn out so very matter of fact, a mere mistake, after all—it is true," he continued, "I did feel a little nervous as the idea occurred that this base

employer might dream of effectually silencing my tale of wonder; and certainly I felt very eager to leave that gloomy library, and now I feel,—I suppose as all persons do feel after great excitement,—languid and dull; so I will try the effects of company." As Walter finished his mental soliloquy, he left his apartment, and hastened to join some gay friends; and he had likewise to invent some excuse for being an absentee after engaging to join a large and well-arranged party on the preceding day, which he had passed in the gloomy library of a mountain fortress.

CHAPTER XIV.

Come hither, come hither,—by night and by day,
We linger in pleasures that never are gone;
Like the waves of the summer, as one dies away,
Another as sweet and as shining comes on.

A FEW days after this adventure Walter received a packet from England; among others, there was a letter from his sister, giving him a full and particular account of all that was passing at home. After relating various events, she writes, “And where do you think I have been, Walter?—guess!—to France?—No. Holland? No, not so far! You will never guess. Listen, then, while I tell you;—to within three miles of Astol Manor House;—yes, my sisterly affection carried me so far, even at the risk of my neck. Oh, brother, brother! wherefore didst thou fall in love with one so completely out of all human reach or knowledge! To tell my story methodically, I must begin methodically. You know

I ever loved order. Some few weeks have elapsed since we accepted an invite from the mother of your friend Lionel Delaval, to help them pass a month at their place in the New Forest. We were a small party, the house is not large, so, according to the old proverb, we had the better cheer; and we had the other side of the proverb too, for we were as merry as if old Momus had been one of the company—small, select, and talented. Only conceive how great must be my sisterly love, when, in the midst of a brilliant, though contracted circle, I could devote so much time to fraternal cares and wishes. Verily, I forgot my own happiness, to dwell on the probable desires of a wanderer in those climes of classic lore, where I would give my little finger to be wandering too. Trevallian says, ‘Wait, the time will come.’ But this has nothing to do with my tale, which, alas! ends in nothing. It is right to prepare you for this termination, else you might probably be supposing so far as to imagine your fair Laura was my

bosom friend, when, alas, alas ! I have not been able to catch a glimpse of the wild rose of poor Walter's affections——”

“What can my rambling sister,” thought Walter, “be after, with all this preamble?”

“Soon after my arrival, I made sundry inquiries respecting your flame ; of course, not disclosing the deep interest we both feel in the subject. Mrs. Delaval once knew the family ; but when Mrs. Penruddock died, all intercourse ceased between Astol and the world. All this we knew before ; however, I said so much that Mrs. Delaval got as warm on the subject as myself ; and she declared it was a sin and a shame to let a poor girl pine away in hopeless solitude ; —so, upon the strength of old connexion and old acquaintance, she determined to make a morning call, and I was to accompany her as the relation of one Walter Rayland, Esq., jun.

“Off we went ; but Heaven bless you, brother of mine, how did you ever contrive to reach the place, and with all your paraphernalia ? We

had horses sent before us, and we drove the roads would permit, when we too steeds. I am no bad horsewoman, Delaval is a perfect Nimrod-ess (a ne your service); but the mighty hunter would have been puzzled, and have matter up in despair, as we did.

“ Before we had sufficient sense to on so wise a resolution as returning to we must needs try if our delicate kid bo were only made to wear under a rid and never intended for walking, would over stumps, and through brakes, down and over dykes. We might just as endeavoured to reach the moon. I lieve, for females, one is as attainable other. An envious briar tore my kid au pied, and the foot itself: it was greatest difficulty I was able to scramble the carriage. Indeed, I should never there if my——what’s the proper word? like husband, it has such a stiff sound

friend Reginald had not occasionally carried his poor wounded wife, while the salt tears dimmed his brilliant eyes at his poor wife's sufferings. My unfortunate foot was so much inflamed that a surgeon was needful to set all right again. By the bye, Walter, Reginald intends to send the doctor's bill for you to discharge, seeing the hurt was received in your service. Well, to make a long story short, our kind hostess sent her son and my lord with strong boots that would stand a thorn, with notes, cards, and compliments added, to invites out of number ; but all to no purpose ;—they neither saw the lord of the mansion, nor your ' ladye love.' A very respectable domestic assured them his master never saw company, and referred them to a steward, I believe, who lived somewhere near. This person decidedly told them every attempt would be useless,—Mr. Penruddock had long declined all society. Our gentlemen mentioned your having been an inmate at the Manor House, and in consequence of their connexion with you,

they had been induced to call. Mr. Groves, I believe they called the steward, then explained how much Mr. Penruddock regretted your having been introduced ;—not very grateful, was it, Walter? when, perhaps, you saved all their lives, or, at least, helped to save them. Finding their efforts were unavailing, our gentlemen relinquished the enterprise, and Mr. Groves very civilly helped them to find their way out of the wood. But the oddest part of the story is, that though we were refused admittance, and though the Lord of Astol thought much of allowing the person who got wounded in assisting his family, to remain in his house, he has given permission to a gipsy-boy to live there, not only eat, drink, and sleep, but positively to be one of the family, perfectly intimate with his daughter, and friendly with himself. What a strange man this Mr. Penruddock must be! You may bless your stars, brother, that you have nothing to do with them. Depend on it, that this Manor House is little better than some houses of reception; you may

be certain they are all lunatic together: the papa must be mad to require such seclusion; the daughter the same to permit it."

"A most unwise conclusion," said Walter, laying aside the letter, while his thoughts were occupied with the information it contained. "That Mr. Penruddock was singular could not be denied; but as for insanity, that was quite out of the question;" and, provoked at the idea, he hurried away to join some young men on an excursion to see sights.

In the course of conversation, Walter inquired if any of the party knew Sir Edward Meredith. Several of them claimed him as an acquaintance, saying that he had been in Rome, but he was now absent on a visit, and they believed he was expected to return daily. Walter had no difficulty in learning the address of the baronet, and the morning after his arrival he called and left a note, requesting an interview with Sir Edward. His call was promptly returned, and Sir Edward Meredith was the next day announced to our

hero. Walter was much surprised when the visiter entered : instead of the middle-aged gentleman, about the same standing as his father, he received the greeting of an elegant, handsome man, in the very prime of life. He might certainly have passed for very little more than thirty ; while his gay attire and animated appearance, with the style and fashion of his manner, might make him seem even younger. Walter was so astonished at the youthful and fascinating address of his visiter, that he did not immediately recover his surprise ; while the idea that it was not so very preposterous, so very out of the way to be mistaken for one so handsome, so distingué, passed over his mind, and created a feeling of complacency towards one who put him in conceit with himself,—wiser heads than our hero's have felt the same impulse.

While Walter's self-love was receiving this satisfactory impression, the visiter had advanced sufficiently near to offer his hand, at the same time saying, " I thank you most sincerely, Mr.

be certain they are all lunatic together: the papa must be mad to require such seclusion; the daughter the same to permit it."

"A most unwise conclusion," said Walter, laying aside the letter, while his thoughts were occupied with the information it contained. "That Mr. Penruddock was singular could not be denied; but as for insanity, that was quite out of the question;" and, provoked at the idea, he hurried away to join some young men on an excursion to see sights.

In the course of conversation, Walter inquired if any of the party knew Sir Edward Meredith. Several of them claimed him as an acquaintance, saying that he had been in Rome, but he was now absent on a visit, and they believed he was expected to return daily. Walter had no difficulty in learning the address of the baronet, and the morning after his arrival he called and left a note, requesting an interview with Sir Edward. His call was promptly returned, and Sir Edward Meredith was the next day announced to our

met at private parties. They had mingled in the motley group of a fancy ball, danced with the same ladies, and in the same rooms; but in small circles they had never met. Walter did not immediately enter on the subject for which he requested this interview, and Sir Edward appeared to consider it merely a social feeling towards a countryman. When the breakfast things were removed, Sir Edward was rising, saying, "I have intruded on you too long, Mr. Rayland; I will now release you to extend your kindness to some other friend."

"If you are not particularly engaged," said Walter, "I will request another hour of your time; I have some information which it may be desirable, if not absolutely requisite for you to know, and it was for this purpose I sought your acquaintance."

Sir Edward looked surprised, but immediately resumed his chair, saying—

"Time is of little moment to so idle and thoughtless a person as myself; and if you can oc

cupy me for the morning, perhaps it may be doing me a service; who knows but it may keep me from mischief. I have not past my mischievous days yet, Mr. Rayland, though possibly you may think I ought."

"I assure you I was somewhat surprised when you entered the apartment; I expected to see a much older person."

"You expected to see me nearly forty; the Red Book says that is my age, and so perhaps it is; I certainly cannot say, not exactly recollecting the day I was born; however, I trust it will make no difference to us, whether I am ten years older or younger. I am young enough for folly, I assure you."

"And yet, Sir Edward, from the occurrences of the last week, I have had sufficient reason to suppose you were not a staid sober gentleman, of a certain age, having been acting the part of your proxy in a tale of romance."

"Indeed! that sounds very like a tale of mystery. May I inquire in what way you were

so flatteringly mistaken for one almost, if not quite, old enough to be your father?"

Walter related the whole proceeding to his companion, who was profoundly attentive, nor once interrupted our hero in the recital of his forced journey and return home. Sir Edward was commencing his regret at the attack, when Walter interrupted him, saying "There is no necessity for apology or sorrow; I was highly amused with my journey, save for some few minutes, when I believed I was attacked by brigands, but my uncomfortable sensations lasted not more than half an hour. I should be unwilling to acknowledge I felt any symptoms of fear; nay, so little uneasiness did I experience, that I should have no great difficulty in persuading myself I had been dreaming."

"You have mentioned circumstances that convince me you were perfectly awake; but it is the last event that would have entered my imagination. This occurrence is closely connected with some family affairs, of which it

would be painful for me to speak, and uninteresting for you to listen. Still, if you desire it, I will relate——”

“Certainly not,” interrupted Walter; “I beg you will not suppose me so very a boy as to wish the secrets of a family to be laid open for my inspection. I have had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, we will forget what led to so desirable an event. And now, Sir Edward, I am at your disposal for the next hours.”

“I must appear very ungrateful and capricious, when I decline your offer, after the essential service you have rendered me, and when I just now said I was at liberty; but the fact is, your information will, I fear, occupy my whole attention, and I should make but a poor companion; if you are disengaged at dinner, and will favour me by partaking mine, I trust I shall have buried these wonders, fathom deep, and be as able, as I am willing, to enjoy your society.”

So it was arranged, and Sir Edward departed.

At the appointed time they met again, when the favourable impression Walter had received was confirmed, and from that time they were often together; but, to Walter's surprise, his gay companion never mentioned, nor alluded to the event that made them acquainted, but once, and that was to say he had seen the man who presided at the castle, and had satisfied him; after that there was a total silence on the subject, which Walter would not have been sorry to have broken; but as Sir Edward was so evidently guarded, he felt it would be impossible for him to commence it. Sir Edward once said, when Walter had not seen him for a day, that he had been engaged in law concerns, and that he had sent a confidential person to England; this might have some relation to the matter specified in the letter.

A continued intercourse did not diminish their friendship. Walter found his companion sufficiently gay; there was no difference in their dispositions, whatever there might be in their

years. Rayland was naturally lively, and he was still so, notwithstanding his love was in abeyance. Being a thorough disciple of Hope he was ever sanguine; but even allowing for the animation of youth, with health and unbounded spirits, he was not to compare with Sir Edward, whose mirth at times went beyond what Walter had ever witnessed in his most youthful associates. At times it was too wild, too exuberant, and Rayland's gaiety sunk under the overwhelming mirth of his companion. Walter had many friends who were deemed choice spirits, but he never witnessed such unbounded jollity as would occasionally break forth from the baronet. At times he was almost tempted to consider such exhilaration as the effect of eccentricity,—a stronger term would occasionally intrude on his imagination,—it certainly was not genuine, heartfelt happiness. Walter was young in life, and, as yet, knew things only by the surface, but even he fancied he could detect something that was not joy, under all this wild display.

Sir Edward Meredith was pre-eminently handsome, his form was perfect, his features faultless; while his dark eyes scarcely needed the aid of words to declare their meaning. The expression of the countenance would be more difficult to define. In society his unbounded gaiety prevented all other expression;—but there were rare intervals when this exhilaration slumbered. Walter had once entered his apartment unperceived, and found him occupied with a book, so much interested that he seemed insensible to all but his study; this was so unusual a circumstance that Walter was loath to disturb the studious hour. Not being in a similar humour, he placed himself on a couch, intending to take a siesta, or muse on his absent love; but the fine features of Sir Edward drew his attention, and again he thought it no ill compliment to be mistaken for one so handsome. They could never have taken a decidedly plain person for the one now before him, that was quite impossible. Walter soon

fell into his usual habit of soliloquizing, his reflections ran thus:—"My volatile friend is most remarkably studious, I never saw his features in such complete repose. I once piqued myself on my knowledge of Lavater; what would my report be of Sir Edward, if I were to examine him critically?—there is good temper, decidedly,—generosity, strongly marked,—passion very deep, that may be either good or bad,—benevolence, there it is, that may be included in temper, not mere indolent good-nature, which cannot take the trouble to be otherwise, that is not Sir Edward's temper or nature. It is needless to seek for sense, look at his eyes and the expression of his mouth;—he is somewhat of an enigma, there are contracted lines that I don't quite understand, and yet they seem out of their place, as if they had pushed themselves where nature never intended them. I am quite at fault, I shall begin to think Flora is right when she calls it all nonsense: she says I never determine the character till I know the man,

but that is going far beyond the mark; he certainly has a very extraordinary physiognomy; so had Socrates—he was bad by nature, education and discipline made him good. Now I should say the reverse was before me; the signs I dislike have been added, they do not appear natural. But what am I about? Is this generous? to seek for faults where I have seen nothing but virtues. I'll forswear a science that has such a tendency." As Walter formed this resolution he made an indignant move, as if to spurn the obnoxious study; the slight gesture was sufficient to disturb Sir Edward, who started at the sight of his companion, and exclaimed—"I beg your pardon, Mr. Rayland, I really was unconscious of your presence."

"It is for me to apologize for having played the traitor's part. I have been some time watching you, and have endeavoured to discover your private feelings by the visible features,—it is so much like treachery that I renounce the art."

As Walter spoke, a change took place in the

countenance of Sir Edward—an unpleasant change, Walter almost repented having spoken so openly. "It was not handsome, certainly," but he fancied his candid avowal would have full weight. "It would have been wiser," he continued to himself, "if I had kept my fault and my penitence equally unknown; I should grieve to lose so pleasant an acquaintance for a mere trifle, though he seems not to consider it such." Walter's uncomfortable reflections were soon ended; the expression of mingled anger and offended pride passed quickly away, and was succeeded by a laugh, as free as it was consoling to the offender.

"Studying my character!—I should like to profit by your trouble. What do you make of me, or have you made me out at all?"

"I am a tyro in the art, if it be one, of that I do not feel sure; and I began to fear I know not what, till your laugh set my mind at rest; but as to describing, far from me be such presumption."

"You acknowledge having made the attempt?"

"True, but with small success; and when I had formed an idea, your merriment sent it wide away."

"Then I seem to you like a blank sheet of paper,—without vice, without virtue."

"No, no! neither the one nor the other. But to judge from what I know, and what I have seen, I would say you were one of Fortune's favourites, and as such had no opportunity for the display of ill; you have, perhaps, never known trouble?"

"You are not so very young as to suppose that can be the case, with one who has seen nearly forty summers; but it speaks well for your own lot, that you think so of others. You have yet to experience the many woes 'that man is heir to,' and its fancied ills, still more numerous; and above all, that most silly of all passions which ruins all young men for companions, save with one."

"Stop, I pray thee. Alas! I am so far gone, that I rather make a merit of my pain, and am ready to proclaim to all the world how deeply I am in love."

"The devil you are!—I should never have suspected it by your constant cheerfulness;—though that only shows your love promises well. You are too young for marriage, and that, I suppose, is the cause of your separation from the fair one. I regret you have an engagement—love interferes sadly with friendship. Ah, I know all you can say; I have heard the tale too often,—we will not speak of it. But I could wish you had no regard for any of the syren sex—angels in form—and sometimes, fiends in reality!"

This was uttered with an expression so bitter and sarcastic, that Walter was startled; but, without giving time for reply, Sir Edward quickly turned the conversation, till, by a flow of light and amusing remarks, he completely effaced the idea his words had created; and this he continued, apparently without effort or design, till

it was time to separate, totally removing from the mind of Walter the idea he had sometimes entertained, of his companion being other than he seemed. It was not a difficult task to deceive one so unsuspecting as our young traveller, who was too candid and open himself to seek for deceit in others. Credulity is ridiculed and condemned, perhaps with reason, and no one would wish to remove that proper caution which is ever desirable; but those who from a guileless disposition have been subjected to deceit and disappointment, may reconcile themselves that suspicion is not an attribute of virtue:—and we have the poet's assertion for believing that

" Goodness thinks no ill where no ill seems."

Walter Rayland, never having known sorrow nor deception, was not likely to look deeper than the surface;—he had yet to learn that a gay exterior may cover an aching heart:—the only vexation he had ever experienced was when his father looked grave and read lectures on extravagance, if he fancied his son's demands for

they were more frequent than they ought to

Walter had been accustomed to feel himself the centre of his most intimate circle; his hilarity gave a tone to his companions, and they usually sought him when any scheme of pleasure was in agitation. His decision and approval were considered necessary in all their parties of gaiety; his wildest mirth was quietness to Sir Edward Meredith's, whose unbounded glee was eagerly sought and courted by all his countrymen in Rome, while the natives viewed with astonishment one so different to the general class of English. Ennui never fastens with so much determination on those most under its control, when they are in pursuit of pleasure; and to keep the tormentor at a distance no one was more equal to Sir Edward Meredith; he appeared to have an overflow of mirth always ready for those with whom he came in contact. Walter was so completely captivated with the conversation of his friend, that when Sir Edward

left Rome on a tour in the neighbourhood. Walter willingly agreed to be his companion at the same time reminding him of the attempt to take him prisoner, and inquiring if it was wise to venture where there might be a chance of again meeting those who formerly sought to make him their captive.

"Oh," returned Sir Edward, "there is not the slightest chance of the attempt being renewed. I have provided against the possibility of such an occurrence: only while I was ignorant of such design was it possible to succeed. Once known, the intent was defeated;—for I may thank you, Mr. Rayland;—and now, if you please, we will not return to the subject, as it is not pleasant, further than reminding you that to this mad and defeated scheme I am indebted for your friendship, which I treasure and end only with our lives. Believe me, I am not insensible to the value of your society, and will not attribute my silence on the subject to forgetfulness or indifference."

Walter wished to continue the conversation ; but there was a seriousness so contrary to Sir Edward's general manner, almost a solemnity, that was not easily to be braved ; at any rate, Walter Rayland felt he could not attempt it.

They pursued their tour with uninterrupted pleasure, and proceeded afterwards to Naples ; where, finding their travelling propensity not satisfied, they extended their course, and crossing the Straits of Messina, they explored the island of Sicily, ascended Etna, and meditated a visit to Malta, and the northern shores of Africa ; but the report of plague and pestilence being at many of the principal places, deterred them, and at length they retraced their steps towards their own native island.

CHAPTER XV.

I turn me to the past, and mourn
 That what has been, again may be;
 I weep, lest ills that I have borne
 Should be in store, my child, for thee;—
 To warp thy truth, to cloud thy brow,
 And make thee all that I am now.

It is the privilege of those who deal in fiction, or, in plain English, "a story-teller," to be confined to no rules or limits; they are possessed of a mental pair of seven-league boots, which transports them as fancy wills, from one region to another, without attention to time or probability. A most convenient privilege it is; were it not for this advantage, they would be condemned, during three long volumes, to dwell in one spot, where the interest would soon be exhausted:—now, when it flags in one part, they have but to call their fairy steamer, and away they fly, from sea to sea, from the gay clime of

Italy to the less vaunted but far dearer shores of England. The recorder of these events, in virtue of this immunity, leaves the hero, without apology, to again visit Astol Manor. Another right of authorship is, not being compelled to account for every moment of time; and it is convenient to the relater to return, not only to the domain of Astol, but to go back to that particular day when Evelyn was absent from dinner, and accounted for his neglect by stating that he fell asleep, which was the very truth. He wandered farther in the park than he intended, the day was extremely hot, and sitting down to rest, he reclined against the stump of a tree, and soon fell into a deep sleep. How long he remained in that happy state of forgetfulness is uncertain; or how long he might have remained is equally uncertain; for he was suddenly roused by a gentle touch on his face, such a sensation as we experience when a feather or leaves softly pass over our features. Evelyn fancied a fly, or something of that kind, was

effected ; but he did not find
same his sleep : the short na-
day is easier to dispel than the
tural night's repose ;—but he
so pleasant that, without the
dinner-bells, he was very well
pleasant dream. Everybody
not always to be accomplished
sleeper was wide awake, though
repose of laziness. When a
descended to open his eyes, he
to close them again. It is impossible
his wonder and amazement, with
a female seated on the turf by
intently on his countenance.
wondered for the moment ; he

no other female above the rank of a domestic. While these ideas rushed to the mind of Evelyn he was rising; but the female laying her hand on his arm, said, "Do not leave me; I have been trying to recollect your features!"

"Do you know me, madam, or have you ever known me?"

"I fear to say, lest I should again be disappointed; and yet," said she, with trembling accents and quivering lips, "these are the eyes, the forehead, the half curl shading the brow;—but the rest is not like—the mouth, the complexion, the form of the face, are not those I look for. How sad it is to doubt where there ought to be certainty! Are you residing at the Manor House, young gentleman?"

"I am, madam."

"And you went there the night the house was attacked?"

"I did."

"Merciful Heaven, keep my senses again from wandering—your name?"

“ Evelyn.”

The female gave a loud scream, and appeared overcome with emotion, yet evidently restraining herself—now moving towards Evelyn as if wishing to press him to her heart—then drawing back with dismay, if not horror. The astonished and sensitive Evelyn was not unmoved;—was this person connected with him? could she be his mother?—her agitation could proceed from no common cause;—yet he remembered how Sir Edward had expressed the warmest feelings, and then changed to unkind coldness. When he first entered Astol, his only wish was to find out the mystery of his birth; love had almost obliterated that anxious desire: it was no longer the first wish of his heart; indeed, he almost feared a change: he might well say,

“ His soul was darkened by her shadow.”

He dreaded any explanation that might remove him from his present abode—from the sight of her who “ was the star of his happiness;”—but though his dream of love was so vivid, so ab-

sorbing, it was impossible for him to suppose the possibility of his mother being beside him, and not feel a glow of affection. The tears rushed to his eyes, and he was unable to ask if a mother's heart had recognized him. When his emotion allowed him power of utterance, the dread of encountering cool, sarcastic words, like those of Sir Edward, prevented his expressing the question which, when he entered Astol, was the great object of his life, and that this lady could explain. He felt certain it was to seek an interview with her that he had been directed by the letter of Mrs. Aubrey to visit Astol; and now it was strange indeed! he feared to question her lest his removal might be the consequence. This feeling, however, gave way to the impulse of nature, and Evelyn, taking her hand, pressed it tenderly, saying,

"Tell me, lady, why are you so agitated, and why do you look so anxiously at me? Have we ever met before?—am I in any way connected with you? Tell me, dearest lady,—you will find me grateful for your kindness."

The lady suffered her hand to remain in Evelyn's, but she made no answer to his words. He had seen so few females, owing to the secluded manner in which he had ever resided, that it was no tax on his memory to endeavour to recall the features of the lady in those few he had known. The examination convinced him she was a stranger to his later years; if they had ever met, it must have been in his infancy. Whoever she was, she seemed not at all eager to come to an explanation;—silent, but evidently with her whole soul fixed on his countenance, she appeared the very emblem of abstraction. Evelyn again addressed her—

“Will you not tell me who you are who so kindly seem to take an interest in me? I have long been wishing to find some person with whom I might claim kindred; say, lady, may I call you by any dear, and to me unknown, name?”

“Have you, then, no protectors?”

“Oh, yes,—Sir Edward Meredeth is my guar-

dian ; but there is no one with whom I can claim relationship."

"Your guardian!—is that all?—has he never expressed a warmer sentiment than such a tie will give?"

"He has very rarely expressed so much; from Sir Edward I seldom received more than cold words and bitter expressions."

"That is not his natural character," said the lady, in a low voice, not addressed to Evelyn, who, however, answered as if it had been.

"I have often thought so; for when in company he ever appeared the most attractive and fascinating of the party."

"He was not so to you?"

"Oh, no—only twice did he express kindness towards me."

"And I am the cause," said the female, with a burst of grief, wild and overpowering. "My poor boy, my darling Evelyn, I have destroyed your happiness as well as that of all those with whom I have been connected. Evelyn,"—her

voice here altered from deep emotion, expressive of sorrow and regret, to a bitter, wild manner—
"Evelyn, if you do not wish every thought, every dream of comfort to be destroyed in your future life, leave me, or I shall wither your young prospects, as I have all—why, why did I ever see the light,—why was I permitted to live to scatter misery around on all who came within my influence!—yet tell me, before you go, did Sir Edward ever mention me?"

The manner of the female was so strange, so expressive, there was at times so much energy, then a look of such resigned despair, that was again followed by an incoherence, as suddenly subsiding to the softest and mildest mood.

The wild irritability of his companion gave to Evelyn the idea of insanity; but there was something that interested him greatly;—it was, perhaps, the impression that his fate might be some way connected with hers. He had been prepared to meet with some clue to himself at Astol, and though the feeling had slumbered, it was

not extinct ; it even seemed to have revived with fresh vigour from the long interval of rest that his affection for Laura had given it. Again he asked himself, could this female be his mother ? and his heart bounded with filial love. He answered her questions in the kindest, tenderest manner, intreating her to tell him if he could in any way give her pleasure :—she started at the word.

“ Pleasure !—and yet I have pleasure, more than pleasure—it is delight to see you, Evelyn !”

“ Why is it delight to see me ? Did you ever see me before ? I must have been very young, for I have no remembrance of you.”

“ Of me !—who would remember me, save to curse the day I was born ?”

“ Speak not so,” said Evelyn, interrupting her, “ no one could do that ; and if you will let me love you, lady, I will bless the day we met.”

“ Will you indeed love me, Evelyn ?” she inquired in a softer voice, looking at him most

affectionately. "Will you love me, and will you never, never hate, despise, and reject me—as—as others have done? Evelyn, dear Evelyn—how sweet is that word—how dear to me,—and how many years have I repeated it only in my prayers! Daily, nightly, have I implored those blessings, which once were mine, to be bestowed on you, and without any fatal interruption:—and will you love me, Evelyn?—will you indeed?"

"Love you, dearest lady! I do love you, my heart tells me I ought to love you, to pay you the fond attention of a son,—are you not my mother?"

As Evelyn spoke, he endeavoured to embrace her, but she drew back, saying, "No, no,—this must not be; I could not bear a second rejection,—I should be mad again." As she spoke she pressed her temples, as if to still the throbbing pulse. After a short pause she resumed, "You will love me, Evelyn,—and I shall see you again?"

“ Oh, yes; come with me now to the Manor House, and let me introduce you to Mr. Penruddock and his daughter; indeed you will love her, and she will love you, dear mother!”

“ Evelyn, if we are to meet again, repeat not that word; you shall one day know your mother, but not now.”

“ Then you do know my mother, if you are not such? But my heart cannot deceive me! I would rather have you, lady, for my mother than any other; believe me, I would!”

The tenderness of Evelyn's voice and manner overcame the fortitude of the female, and she sobbed aloud; but still withdrew from the caresses of Evelyn. At length, recovering herself, she said hastily,

“ Will you meet me here to-morrow?—or, stay,—there is a better place, the clump of trees by the mount. I will be there at midnight.”

“ At midnight!—Oh, no, you will injure your health.”

“ My health!” said she, interrupting him,—

" my health—fear not for that ; I have braved the night after night ; I have braved the storm. I have dared the thunder !—the lightning has not power to cool my beating heart, the night-dews are unfelt. I have braved frost and snow, nor sought my couch in summer ; I glared, and seemed to scorn a wreath of thorns. Fear not for my health ! Oh, the winds had power to send me where I wished—where grief is silenced, and sorrow has a cure ! But my penance will not yet be done. Pray for me, Evelyn, that I may soon return to my last home !"

" Speak not so sadly, lady, it rends my heart. But come with me to Astol, to the house of my father, and there, lady, you will find kind friends."

" I had them once at the Manor House."

" Then come again and meet me here, more !"

" Evelyn," said she, mournfully, " I cannot do not what you ask. I shall never enter the Manor House as a friend. I have caused

misery there; but I shall go, and I do go there. I never let the dark hours of night pass by without seeking what relief may be given, and only at Astol can I find it; and sometimes in the day I have been an inmate there for a few short moments."

"Then you need not object to come now with me; I will insure you a welcome from Miss Penruddock, and I think I can from her father."

"Name it not," she returned, shuddering; "speak not of it, or I shall lose the little composure I have; but say, Evelyn, will you meet me at midnight?—Oh, no, it would be selfish,—your health."

"My health!—I will meet you most willingly, if you will fix no other time."

"There is no other time but this, and this is your dinner-hour; you could not always be absent; you must make some excuse, without hinting at our interview, or else we may not meet again."

"Then, lady, I will punctually be here; and then will you not tell me that I am your son?"

"I will love you as my son, if you will let me love you. Oh, no, no,—do not; bid me hate you; and despise me yourself. I have brought misery on all who ever loved me; let me not draw you in for a share of the curse which hangs over me. Do not meet me, Evelyn; say you will not come; say you hate, contemn, and detest me! Farewell, Evelyn, we will not meet again."

"We will—we must. You shall not leave me, lady, till you promise to be at the clump of firs; and if no other time will do, it shall be midnight. Oh, if you have mercy or compassion, say you will be there!"

The lady was apparently overcome with the earnestness of Evelyn's manner, and she gave the promise he required.

Evelyn's abstraction on the evening after this interview is not to be wondered at, nor will the midnight visitors to Lucy's haunted grove require any elucidation; and when Lucy had convinced Laura that the tale she had been relating was no fiction, the affair gave her very little

more concern. She had been too much accustomed to marvels to dwell on them; the only effect it had on Lucy was to confine her movements, and contract her circle of action. There were rooms and places that no earthly power would have bribed her into visiting—she was a sensible girl too;—but, as she often repeated to herself, “Who can doubt their own senses,—my eyes have seen and my ears have heard,—are not they sufficient to prove the reality of these wonders? Every person must be guided by the light that shines on them, and the sights I have witnessed are sufficient to convince me.” Lucy, however, did not give up the attempt of converting her companions, till she was tired out; Laura reasoned, but, as Lucy told her, “she was sure, against her conscience.” Reuben laughed at and quizzed her for her love of ghost stories, and Mrs. Weston would not listen to them at all. They were a set of infidels altogether, Lucy said, as she desisted, and in time the subject appeared to lose its interest, even to

her. "It was impossible to wonder for ever," so Lucy very wisely determined to let the wonders take care of themselves.

Full two months did the unknown lady and Evelyn meet regularly in the park; the nights were now getting longer and colder, and still the lady always spoke of meeting the next night at the usual hour. Her manner when they met was ever tender and affectionate; she would question him concerning his early years, and his education; no mother could take a greater interest in the welfare of a son; though whenever he in return attempted to question her, the answers he received were always cautious and guarded, while she appeared to suffer so much pain that the young man was constrained to desist. There was much merit in his forbearance, believing firmly, as he did, that she was his mother; this she had never denied, neither had she confirmed the supposition.

But Evelyn could not gain the slightest idea respecting his father, or the name and rank of

his midnight friend. Various circumstances would sometimes point to Sir Edward Meredith as the person to whom he owed the duty of a son. But the manner of the baronet, with the two exceptions, had been so cold, so unlike a father, that the idea gave him pain, and he would dismiss it as quickly as possible. "I could love Sir Edward," said he once, when he was musing on the subject, "there have been moments in which I could have felt the fondest affection for my guardian; but how soon would the sarcastic speech, when addressed to me, remove the enthusiasm that I felt, when I have witnessed some kind deed, or listened to the maxims of generosity that occasionally came from him, as it were unwillingly. If Sir Edward were my parent, he could never maintain such a system of rigid politeness and cold formality; but he must be some way connected with me, there can be no question of that." It was vain to conjecture; to Sir Edward he dared not apply; the lady would not enlighten

him. Sometimes his thought pointed to Mr. Penruddock, but there was so much mournful abstraction about the Lord of Astol, that Evelyn felt he could never question him,—he could never risk the chance of increasing the woe that evidently preyed on his protector; besides, he now rarely saw him, save at the silent and rather formal dinner; Mr. Penruddock took no other meal with his family; only Laura had the privilege of visiting her father's private apartment, and she was not permitted that liberty at all seasons.

It was very little that Evelyn ever saw of Mr. Penruddock, but that little was sufficient to win the heart of one so open to every amiable and kindly feeling as the grateful boy. The Lord of Astol was ever gentle and urbane; when he addressed any of his young companions, there was that winning softness and fascinating interest respecting the comfort and welfare of those with whom he was domesticated, that engaged the affections of all; while, at the same time,

when not actually speaking, there was a serious gravity that was not to be interrupted. This mournful dejection that never left him excited the most respectful compassion, and desire to alleviate his melancholy. The youthful inhabitants of the Manor House had no positive cause for their supposition, when they each attributed the gravity of Mr. Penruddock to sorrow; when he did enter into conversation at the dinner hour, it was not of a mournful, nor certainly of a lively description. There was a sort of resigned composure which spoke of submission to passing events, and a total disregard to all passion, all wishes, all desires. Mr. Penruddock evidently had none, and it was perfectly clear that nature had not denied him the feelings of man. His intelligent countenance at times spoke of talent and susceptibility too plainly to be doubted: but generally all was calm, still, and composed; there only wanted the cowl and monkish garb to portray one of

Guido's holy and heavenly forms,—so subdued, so passionless.

Evelyn felt that his only hope of elucidation rested on the unknown lady. He was strangely situated: he had now been nearly two years at Astol, and during that time he had received no communication from Sir Edward Meredeth; he was not even certain of his existence. Once he had commissioned Reuben Barwell to inquire respecting him, when he was informed that his guardian was still abroad: at the same time Reuben requested he would not try his friendship in this way again; adding, "We are all, Mr. Evelyn, on the Astol estate, under promise not to bring any intelligence to the Manor House relative to the world; nothing beyond the park palings is to be reported here."

"It is a strange prohibition!—surely Mr. Penruddock can never expect to continue this system? Even now his daughter should be presented. When I was in London I often heard of young ladies being introduced, and it was

considered an absolute necessity for those who possessed birth and fortune. Did you ever hear, Reuben, what Mr. Penruddock's intentions are on this point?"

"Never. But my mother and I have sometimes talked it over, and she thinks it is Mr. Penruddock's desire to keep Miss Laura always in the same recluse way."

"But she will marry! The heiress of Astol will not be permitted to remain single."

"I believe it is her father's wish that she should, but this is only my conjecture; in reality I know as little as you do on these matters. I wish I knew if Mr. Penruddock intends to keep both the young ladies single."

Evelyn laughed at the lover-like air with which this was spoken, and advised Reuben to make the inquiry at once of Mr. Penruddock.

Reuben shook his head, saying Lucy strongly objected; she was fearful of being separated entirely from Laura, "And that," continued Reuben, "would be very terrible to both. However,

I have promised Lucy we will let the matter rest at present; though I do not agree with her that we shall be improved in character, and so forth, by a few years being added to our age."

"You are happy," sighed Evelyn, as he turned away, "in having only a few years to wait, and having Lucy willing to wait for you!"

As autumn advanced the nights grew chill and damp. When Evelyn next met the lady, he expressed the anxiety he felt lest her health should be endangered by the dews and cold air.

"My health suffer!" said she, with a scornful laugh, "will a few drops of rain extinguish a furnace, or the dew of heaven allay the feverish throbs of this pulse? Fear not for me, I would welcome the thunderbolt, and feel grateful for a release from misery."

"But if your release should increase my sorrow, dearest lady, will you not, for my sake, endeavour to preserve that health which is so precious to me?"

"For you," she replied with fervour, "I would do anything; but, Evelyn, it is not right that you should be lost in these shades; you have talent, health, and energy; you should now be making connexions with the first and noblest in the land, not wasting life in a solitude. What are your plans, your intentions?"

"I have not any. I have already told you why I sought to be introduced at Astol; no satisfactory result has followed; you will not acknowledge me as your son, and I belong to no one; what should I do in the world? and if Mr. Penruddock will allow me, why should I not remain? I am happy here, at least as much so as I should be any where."

"But this would be so strange a life for one so young, and particularly for you, Evelyn."

"Mr. Penruddock intends the same secluded life for his daughter; surely I might endure the same fate as one so lovely and so estimable as Laura Penruddock, without complaint or murmur?"

The lady made no immediate reply ; after a short pause she again resumed the conversation, by inquiring if Miss Penruddock and Evelyn were on familiar terms.

" Laura behaves to me as she would to a brother: such, she says, was her father's injunction, when he spoke of me after my first introduction at the Manor House."

" And do you regard her as a sister?"

Evelyn remaining silent, the lady repeated the question, when he answered, " That it was impossible to live with Laura and not love her."

Another silence succeeded, which lasted longer than the previous one: this pause was again broken by the lady, who said abruptly, " Evelyn, you love Mr. Penruddock's daughter?"

" Have I not just told you that it is impossible to know Miss Penruddock and not love her?"

" True, but that is not the love I mean. You love her with the intensity of ardent affection, not the gentle feeling of friendship. And is this feeling mutual?"

Evelyn was silent for a few moments, at length he said, "I fear not."

"Her affection is not so devoted as yours, nor so expressive; it should not; still it may be equal."

Evelyn shook his head.

"You can have no rival. You are the only person she has ever seen, except those who reside in her father's house."

"You forget, lady, the gentleman who came so fortunately to their rescue, and by whose assistance I gained admission to Astol."

"Ah, I remember, the young man who slept one night at the Grange. 'Tis strange that I should forget him, for I fancied you were the visiter at Mr. Barwell's; great was my disappointment on finding the mistake. And is Laura engaged to this person?"

"Oh, no! Nor do I believe there is any communication; but still I fear she did prefer him."

"You are like all lovers, Evelyn, ingenious

in tormenting yourself: if there had been no intercourse since you have resided at the House as a visiter, there can be no obstacle, let not that be an obstacle in your claim."

"Claim, my dear mother! do you so,—what claim can I have? A stranger, unknown, nameless, and obscure."

"You are neither," interrupted the impatient wildness, "you are neither known, nor unknown, Evelyn; I have told you this before."

"To myself I am all. To Laura I am nothing. To prefer my suit, she knows less of the man than I do, and, perhaps, cares less; but Mr. Penruddock would require an explanation as to my name and rank; Laura will never be persuaded to marry without both."

The lady made no observation, but in the imperfect light she appeared in deep thought.

"I have," said Evelyn internally, "I have told my love, but I met not love in return."

did not then consider the advantages of wealth, nor what Laura might expect; fool that I was to suppose that I might pretend to the heiress of Astol! I may thank Mrs. Weston for enlightening me as to the distance between us; and if there were no distance, would Laura listen? Alas, I fear not! She does not now colour as she once used when Mr. Rayland's name was mentioned, but I am not certain if that feeling of preference has subsided."

Evelyn's thoughts now darted off to those times when the discourse had turned on Walter, and he was soon engaged in all the horrors of remembrance, which told him that Laura had once felt more than sisterly affection for the gay forester. Poor Evelyn was not backward in inflicting these bitter recollections on his sensitive mind, when his painful thoughts were interrupted by his companion, who, gently taking his hand, said, "We will part now, Evelyn; to-morrow we will meet again, and then, I trust, I shall have some comfort, some hope for you.

And now, farewell, till the sun has again come and departed; farewell, Evelyn!—till then dream of joy and happiness."

But Evelyn's was not a sanguine disposition—he did not dream either of love or happiness: it was too much to hope, so he tried to forget all the lady had said, but that was as difficult as to hope all things. Hope will steal in, though we endeavour to keep the gentle goddess away, and so Evelyn found, when some hours had passed, in which he pondered over every word, every sentence uttered by his unknown friend. She appeared to know him well, and if she judged he might aspire to the hand of Miss Penruddock, the heiress of large domains, she must know he was entitled to such pretension. Then, perhaps, he might be equal to Laura, and her father would not object; and, above all, she might have forgotten her first love: all this was possible,—at length he persuaded himself it was probable, and possibly the next night might clear up all mystery, all doubt.

Hope and joy are as potent enemies to sleep as misery and sorrow, perhaps more so: we may be lulled after a time by the intensity of grief; but the excitement of happiness will not subside, the fever of the spirits will not allow the mind to sink into repose. This tumult of conflicting sensations pressed so heavily on Evelyn, that he was compelled to relinquish the contest, and seek that composure in exertion which his couch was unable to give.

CHAPTER XVI.

Oh ! there are looks and tones that dart
 An instant sunshine through the heart,—
 As if the soul that minute caught
 Some treasure it through life had sought.
 So came thy every glance and tone,
 When first on me they breathed and shone ;
 New as if brought from other spheres,
 Yet welcome as if loved for years.

WHEN Evelyn again met the unknown lady, Laura Penruddock was their chief subject of conversation, the enamoured youth pouring forth her praises, and lamenting his wayward destiny, that, as an obscure individual, it was madness even to dream of the heiress of Astol. The lady allowed Evelyn to have the chief share of this night's conversation, occasionally making some remark or observation that had the effect of rendering the communication more free and explicit, when the subject was completely exhausted, or rather when the auditress was satis-

fied or wearied, for the gentleman would have continued "till daylight told them to retire." But only to those who can participate are such tales pleasing; and the lady, who never was inattentive when Evelyn spoke, at length ended the eulogy of Laura, by thus addressing her companion:—"I have not been listening to you with the idea of gaining information respecting the daughter of your protector; if I had not heard repeatedly of her virtue, I should give his child the credit of being good and amiable. It was to ascertain the extent of your attachment, which I believe to be sincere and honourable. There is no possible reason why you should not aspire to her hand; you are her equal in birth and fortune; there is a trifling difference in point of age, but so trifling as not to need a thought. Make your proposals, then, to Mr. Penruddock, and doubt not they will be accepted."

Evelyn had often been induced to fancy that his unknown friend (whose conduct appeared,

even to his slight knowledge of the world, strange and unaccountable) could not be in full possession of her reason, and this advice more strongly confirmed the idea. He, however, made no remark, and after a slight pause the lady continued,—

“ You shall not make your proposal with the impression on your mind that you are an ‘obscure individual;’ I will at once relate your pretension to birth and wealth;—you are,” said she, hesitating, and then speaking rapidly and in a hurried voice, “ you are the son of Sir Edward Meredith !”

“ Sir Edward Meredith !—impossible !”

“ You are his only son, the heir to his rank and estates !”

“ And is he aware that we are so connected ?”

“ He never ought to have doubted it.”

“ And why did he doubt it ?”

“ That shall be explained at some future time, at present it cannot.”

“ Sir Edward Meredith ! who always appeared a strange, inconsistent character, and ever to me

cold, stern, and rigidly polite!—Had I been left to conjecture among those I knew, Sir Edward Meredith would have been the last person I should have supposed my parent. Why Mr. Penruddock, whom I have known so lately, and who is an absolute lover of solitude, even he seems to take more interest, at any rate he speaks more kindly to me than the proud baronet! Oh, he never can be my father!”

“He is, Evelyn, and your opinion does him injustice; he is noble and generous. Mr. Penruddock himself has not a kinder heart, nor a more honourable mind, than Sir Edward Meredith! I will pledge my life he has so arranged his affairs that there shall be no dispute hereafter; and though he will not acknowledge you now, you may rest assured you will be unmolested in the succession.”

“But this is so strange, so wholly unaccountable!”

“Nevertheless it is true.”

“But Mr. Penruddock never——”

"If necessary, Mr. Penruddock will confirm my words."

"And my mother?"

"Your mother is the lawful wife of Sir Edward. But the night wears apace, Evelyn. I shall not be here to-morrow;—you will have two days to meditate and make your request to Mr. Penruddock. Fear not the result from him; of the daughter's consent I cannot speak; for the father's I will answer. When we meet again, I trust all will be as you wish. Farewell, dearest Evelyn, obey my instructions and be happy!"

As the lady spoke she walked fast from the place, and before Evelyn had recovered from his astonishment she was out of sight.

"Be happy! Ah, I doubt, even if Sir Edward were my acknowledged father, whether I might expect happiness in this way. Laura's affection for me is too open, too sisterly;—I fear this kind friend has deceived herself, and will deceive me also;—and Sir Edward—certainly,

On two occasions he did embrace me, as a father might embrace a son; but had I been such, could he for so many years have treated me with merely cold politeness? 'Tis true, I had the greatest attention, and the utmost care taken of my education and health; but no parental love ever followed those benefits. Oh, this lady must be wrong!"

As Evelyn came to this conclusion, he slowly walked towards the house, meditating on what he had heard, and debating the propriety of obeying the counsels of his mysterious friend. She certainly was acquainted with the circumstances of his early life, and why might she not be equally correct in the rest of her information? Still it was a fearful venture; by following her advice he might offend, and so forfeit the protection of, Mr. Penruddock, and be obliged to leave his present residence, which was only too dear to him; and Laura,—he should lose the happiness of seeing her daily! Could he—dare he destroy the comfort of his situation, perhaps

lose the hold he now had on the affections of those around him? Morning found him unresolved and undecided.

On recalling the words and manner of the lady, Evelyn, after giving it due consideration, determined to act according to her advice;—but not that day,—he would take some hours for reflection, and then he must be guided by circumstances.

It is a great trial to the mind, when we have some grand concern that occupies every thought, every idea, and which, if we could command the passing events, should take precedence of all others,—to have our train of reasoning broken in upon by the light conversation of those around us, whose remarks and questions, however foreign they may be to our thoughts,—however trifling and insignificant they may be in themselves,—we are expected to answer rationally and readily, while, perhaps, our senses will admit but one idea. Evelyn was particularly exposed this day to that annoyance: his female companions tried

his patience most severely; even Laura appeared unreasonable in her calls on his time and attention. While he was musing on the probability of the information he had received the previous evening, and arranging his ideas in various ways, he was called to decide on the merits of some dahlias, respecting which Laura and Lucy differed. Then Lucy would insist on his guessing at a conundrum that she had been making;—and Mrs. Weston entreated, as a great favour, that he would draw Sir Charles Grandison and Miss Byron, in their weddingdresses, on a fine skreen that she was ornamenting, and nobody could draw a dignified figure like Mr. Evelyn. This was too much; Evelyn could bear no more, and rising hastily he left the room.

The next day Laura was again summoned by her father at an unusual hour. She speedily obeyed, and proceeding to the library, she found Mr. Penruddock reclining in a large chair by the fire, so absorbed in meditation that at first he did not notice the entrance of his daughter,

who, accustomed to his fits of abstraction, softly closed the door, and, taking a chair opposite her father, waited patiently till he noticed her presence. It was so long, however, before he did appear conscious that she was near him, that Laura very quietly took a book, and was soon as deeply engaged with her author as Mr. Penruddock was with his own reflections. Her employment did not so wholly engross her sensations as to prevent her noticing that the fire, which was always lighted in the large old-fashioned apartment early in the autumnal evenings, required stirring. The noise caused by this movement, and the sudden blaze of the flame, recalled her father's attention. With a deep and heartfelt sigh, which ever accompanied his return from meditation to the fact that there were other persons about him, he said,

"Laura, my dear, I did not see you, but I have been waiting for you."

Laura smiled inwardly as she thought how long she had been his companion. He continued,

" I have something of consequence to say, my love ; shut the door before I commence."

" I did so, dear Sir, when I first came in."

" You are now, Laura, I believe, nearly nineteen ?"

" I shall be in a few months."

Mr. Penruddock appeared not to notice that Laura had replied to his questions : he proceeded, " It was once my hope that you might ever experience any change in the quiet, even seclusion of this secluded life ; it was my intention that your days should end as they commenced, in the deserted shades of Astol Manor : but vain are the efforts of man : with all my care, all my anxiety, notwithstanding every effort of mine to prevent such an event, there have been two strangers dwelling under our roof, two young men who would be equally eligible had I desired a matrimonial connexion for you."

Mr. Penruddock stopped, and Laura was so much astonished at this exordium, that she had no power to speak ; she was not, however, re-

quired. Her father, after a silence of a few moments, continued, "It was my wish, my desire, that you should never marry. I believed you more likely to enjoy content and peace in a single state; happiness is not even to be dreamed of in this life. Your mother, Laura——" here his voice faltered, and a more deadly paleness came over his usually pale face. Laura had never heard her father mention her mother;—had she not been all attention before, this would most effectually have interested her; but her feelings were awakened from the first; and she now feared even to breathe, lest she should lose one sentence, one word, relating to her mother. Her father appeared to exert his utmost endeavour to suppress his emotion, as he proceeded:

"She was an angel in mind and person;—if ever human being merited happiness on earth, it was your mother;—she gave joy and bliss to all who came within her sphere;—yet this lovely, talented idol of many hearts was not happy, her days were wretched, and her death——Oh, God! I cannot speak of that——"

Mr. Penruddock rose, and hastily paced the room. Laura went towards him, with the intention of soothing his affliction ; but he motioned her from him. It was a considerable time before he was able to resume the conversation, which at last he did, by saying abruptly, as if the subject was unpleasant, and he was willing to end it as quickly as possible :

“ Laura, I find this life will not do for you ; you must marry. Do not interrupt me ; I have a conviction on my mind that Heaven wills your entrance into another scene of life. So many events have occurred, all in some way relating to yourself, that I feel persuaded your lot is not to be what I designed. It is a fearful trial, but Heaven’s will be done. I have learned to say that, Laura, in bitterness, in sorrow, and with submission :—in the pride of my heart I was lifted up above the state of humanity :—the bliss experienced was unalloyed, and I proudly calculated on its continuance. My pride was humbled—years of sorrow and penitence have

not, nor ever can, atone for the consequences of my presumption and

“ Oh, no, say not so, dear father, not guilt except by name !”

“ Some day, Laura, you shall have suffered, but not now ; my present interview is to ask if you have possession for either of the young people who have inhabited Astol ?”

Laura felt the colour rush to her face at this question ; but Mr. Penruddock's mark, so she hoped it escaped him. He continued, “ I once thought, when Mr. Rayland had gained an insight into my heart. I was rejoiced to find out that but now, Laura, here is another opportunity. This part of her father's speech I fancy her senses deceived her ; no, she listened even more attentively than I had already done ;—there had been no change at Manor House since Mr. Rayland's knowledge ; it was scarcely po

anger should desire to marry one he had never
; and with a wish to understand this unwell-
e and unpleasant communication she re-
ned silent and motionless as her father pro-
ed :

I am not aware if you are informed of the
osal that has been made to me for you this
ing?" Laura was more than ever per-
ed. How could she know of a proposal when
was ignorant that any person had visited
for months? The idea of Evelyn never
red, not even for one moment.

Yes, Laura, the present offer is unexception-
in every respect; and though it is dreadful
one, even in imagination, to anticipate the
when we may separate, yet, in this in-
ce, I must add my wishes to those of
lyn's, that you will consent to become his
."

Evelyn!—My dear papa, you cannot mean
t you say? Evelyn!—I the wife of Evelyn!"
Whom else, my dearest child, can I mean?

I have seen no other person for many months, besides our own family. Evelyn is well born, well educated, and the heir of large estates; though that would be a minor consideration, as you will have more than sufficient; but Evelyn is, for one so young, all I could wish, and I trust, dearest Laura, your affection will meet his."

At this part of her father's address, Laura was indeed more than surprised; she was completely bewildered and lost in astonishment. Though Lucy had the most sincere affection and respect for her benefactor, yet she had imbibed opinions that for worlds she would not have promulgated; but she could not so well conceal her feelings, nor was she aware of the expression that occasionally spread over her features. Though no word had ever passed on the subject, yet at length the idea was mutual; and Laura was perfectly amazed when Mr. Penruddock mentioned the name of one whom she had unconsciously considered so nearly related. That her father should contemplate her marriage at

ll, was, after what he had said when Walter proposed, indeed strange; but that Evelyn should be the intended bridegroom was beyond all belief. Evelyn!—a boy!—one who had been received, at first, in the capacity of an attendant to Mr. Rayland; one whom she had believed to be of doubtful origin!—It was too incredible, and Laura could not recover her recollection or composure sufficiently to give the answer Mr. Penruddock appeared to be expecting. The affection she had felt for Walter Rayland was certainly less vivid than it had been; but it was not quite extinct; though that was unknown even to herself. She was not aware of the extent of her affection for him; which, though dormant, was ready to blaze forth if circumstances were to bring them again in contact: but at the present moment Walter Rayland did not occur to her memory. She was wholly absorbed by her bewildering astonishment; she did not even hear her father when he stated the fact of Evelyn's rank and station in the world;—

she heard nothing, saw nothing; and in the space, she sat the very picture of abstraction.

Mr. Penruddock did not attempt to break his daughter's reverie; perhaps he was himself under the influence of agitating ideas. He remained occupied with their own reflections. The deep tones of the hall clock resounded in the remembrance of their previous conversation, when Mr. Penruddock again resumed the discourse.

"It may appear strange, my dear daughter, after what I once said on a similar occasion, that I should advocate the cause of any man who can acknowledge a predilection for this abstract science. I can explain the motive for such interference. If you approve this proposal, there will be a connexion so pleasing or so desirable, that would give me more satisfaction than what I have seen of Evelyn's character. It will make any woman happy. There is no question of his love being sincere; and he has said he, hesitating, "your marriage

may restore some small portion of my peace, my happiness ; if it has not that effect, there is no earthly event that will or can give me consolation !”

This was said in so mournful a tone, and with a manner so expressive of sorrow, that it was too much for the affectionate heart of Laura, and she mentally resolved to make every sacrifice that might have the blessed effect of restoring her father to composure, perhaps to happiness. She assured him his wish should be her only guide, she had no will but his, and every thought of hers should have his happiness for its object.

“No, Laura, my child, that must not be, without your own happiness can be secured at the same time. Mine is fled for ever ; and what little peace I might procure shall never be purchased at the expense of your blighted hopes. If you can love Evelyn, it will give me more unalloyed satisfaction than I ever expected to receive in this world ; but it would add bitterness to my already broken heart, if your wishes were sacrificed to mine.”

Laura made no reply, but she breathed a silent vow to have no object but the comfort of him who had no solace but her affections; though why it should be so she could not comprehend. Many husbands had mourned the loss of good and affectionate wives,—her books had recorded the mournful regrets of those who had wept over the graves of loveliness and virtue, and yet lived not only happily, but formed new connexions,—she had never read of one who gave up the world so entirely, to mourn in silence and solitude the being never to be recalled,—she could remember no parallel case,—but that she at length attributed to the writer's disliking to dwell on such painful subjects; and perhaps her father's was no uncommon grief; it might only be her ignorance that suggested the idea of his sorrow being excessive and bordering on despair: however it might be, she determined to live only to promote his comfort and peace; and though she felt no delight at the idea of being united to Evelyn, she certainly felt no repugnance; she

would rather have remained single; but her father wished it, and she would comply. This compliance might, perhaps, have been withheld, had she known her father's principal desire for the alliance arose from the idea that she would not be permitted to remain in her present secluded state;—with his unremitting endeavour to the contrary, she had been seen and loved. When he was no longer here to protect her, she might fall a prey to the worthless and designing; she was already known, and her wealth alone would attract the mercenary. He now, for the first time, regretted his utter retirement; he had left no friend to whose care he could intrust his daughter;—with this painful impression he conceived he should better perform his duty to her, by promoting the suit of one he believed worthy of her love. No more was said on the subject, and they soon after departed—Mr. Penruddock to his customary solitude, and Laura to reflect on the change that she once believed would never happen with her; while she

strove to banish any unpleasant feelings which might arise at the alteration in her prospects.

Several weeks passed, during which to the surprise of all the inhabitants of Astoria, Penruddock was absent one entire day. He went out early with Reuben Barwell, and did not return till late at night. No information was given, and no one presumed to question him. Lucy had no opportunity even to write to Reuben; business kept him from home. A few days after, her father returned with a fresh occupation, and she thus addressed him after having some conversation with Reuben, who had received some brief information from Mr. Penruddock on this subject.

"And so you really are going to be married, Miss Penruddock?—I did expect, from your friendship, that this information would come directly from you, Laura. You have all my thoughts, all my wishes and desires, and you have not equal confidence in me. I can only expect this from you."

"I have always, Lucy, been very speedy in relating any event that gave me particular pleasure."

"And does not this, Laura?" exclaimed Lucy, in a voice of alarm; "does not this give you pleasure?"

Laura made no reply, and Lucy hastily continued, "Then, gracious Heaven, why marry?—My dearest Laura, why should you, who of all beings ought to have your wishes attended to, why should you marry without it gives you perfect delight? But yet, how I deceived myself; I really thought you loved him, you had the appearance certainly."

"You are very wise in these affairs, Lucy," said Laura, attempting to smile, "and you are right; I do love him; if he were my brother I could not love him better!"

"Your brother!—that love will not do for a husband!"

"I shall feel the proper love in time;—nay, doubt it not."

"In time!—I had rather you felt it now;—but perhaps it is the long absence which has weakened your affection; renewed intercourse will recall love."

"Renewed, Lucy! there has been no absence, we have been constantly together."

"In the name of all that is wonderful of whom are you speaking?"

"Can you form no idea, Lucy?"

"Mr. Rayland, to be sure;—and you certainly have been separated from him."

"No, Lucy," answered Laura, endeavouring to suppress a sigh by attempting to laugh,—
"guess again."

"I can't indeed;—it must be some stranger, one of Mr. Penruddock's former friends?—you shake your head at that,—well, then, it is a joke altogether, and Mrs. Weston had an inclination to be merry. No, is not that the case? well, then, I must give it up. The puzzle is too deep for my poor brains—so satisfy my curiosity and say, dear Laura, whom Mr. Penruddock de-

worthy to be your husband? There are not many who are; and yet how can I tell, or, indeed, any of us, when we have been shut up in a wilderness, like Friar Philip and his pupil? This "Intended," no doubt, is everything he ought to be, so describe him to me as he has been described to you."

"There is no necessity for that; you know him well;—there is but one young man who holds intercourse with us."

"I know him well," said Lucy, sitting down and turning suddenly pale, while her voice faltered and her limbs trembled, "the only young man who holds intercourse with us—that must be——"

"Why are you so agitated, Lucy? what can be the reason? Evelyn can be nothing to you."

"Evelyn!" exclaimed Lucy, while the tears ran from her eyes, and an hysterical laugh gave vent to her feelings, "Evelyn! is it only Evelyn?"

"Why, Lucy, my poor Lucy, do be com-

posed," said Laura, who, though she was completely frightened, could not restrain a laugh: "I am not going to rob you of Reuben; how could you suppose it was him I meant?"

"Nay, it was much more natural to suppose him, the only man with whom we have daily intercourse; it was much more probable than a boy, a kind good gentle person certainly, but still a boy. Miss Penruddock, the heiress of Astol Manor, to be wedded to a——Oh!—you do not mean it! What whim can have entered your heads? I know you do not dislike a jest, but Mrs. Weston seemed in no jesting humour, and this——"

"Was carrying the jest too far, was it not, Lucy, when it had the effect of frightening you so completely? Reuben would be very pleased to know what deep hold he has on your affection."

"I do not intend he shall know it at present. But do unsay all this nonsense; you are not going to marry Evelyn?"

"To be married to him I am, most certainly ; at least I have given my promise."

"But Mr. Penruddock will never consent."

"It is my father's wish."

"Well, I have often said this is the land of enchantment, and that wonders will never end. But did you give your consent willingly?—You need not answer me. You said before, if it had been a pleasant event, you would at once have informed me. But can your father allow you to marry against your inclination?"

"We will not speak on this subject. Whatever you may suppose, I gave my consent willingly, but perhaps I might not wish to marry at all ; and now, Lucy, when this affair does take place, will you follow my example, and reward Reuben's affection at the same time?"

"Oh, Reuben himself must ask me that ; I never transact business by deputy. Should the gentleman wish it, he will condescend to supplicate."

"You forget, Lucy, for all you speak so

proudly, how frightened you were thought I had stolen your true love."

"Why when we have considered our own, we do not like to lose it, to have it away by force."

"Well, then, the better way will be against such an event; so mind, I see the sun sees me a bride, it must shine on me also."

"But a vagrant, an attendant on a land!"

"He is a gentleman by birth and

"And pray what ridiculous whim led him to assume the disguise of a gipsy? I always thought you loved a 'maiden fair?' I always thought you romantic, but this exceeds all, and suits him too as he was when he first came here with his wealth and fortune! Well I am glad of that, for though these advantages do not suit me, yet I know how to estimate them in you, Laura, they are indispensable. I should have died of horror, if you had

with the eyes of love on any under a knight of high degree. And may I ask what rank this gentle swain holds in the world?"

"One step higher than 'gentle knight,'—he is the son of a baronet, a Sir Edward Meredith."

"Well, more wonders! And did Mr. Penruddock know this when he was admitted on that memorable day that took one away, who was in every respect worthy of you, and left this boy behind? If he is to be a baronet hereafter, that accounts for Madam Weston being satisfied; 'tis pity his name is not Charles, with a Grandison following it, then her joy would be complete. Laura, dear, do not let her have the management of the marriage ceremony, or you will have just such a train of coaches, and bridesmen and bridesmaids, as Miss Byron had."

"And where are they to come from,—the moon, Lucy?"

"Ah, true, I forgot that. But I suppose the

gipsy Sir will have connexions, friends, relations, and so forth: there will be all the Merediths,—is that the name? It is not a bad one, though I like Rayland better. Ah, he was a gentle gipsy!”

“ We must forget all those things, Lucy. I have acknowledged to you that I would have preferred a single life: now be merciful, and do not recall ideas and persons who ought not to be remembered. I have given my promise, and it shall be kept with cheerfulness.”

As Laura spoke she left the room. When she was out of hearing, Lucy rose also, saying: “ You may deceive yourself, you cannot me: you do love Mr. Rayland, and you have only a sisterly regard for this boy. My poor dear Laura, how much happier I am than the heiress of these domains! I am engaged to one I love, and think superior to all. Laura would say there was no great merit in their being superior to servants, aged men; well, it is very true, but when we do enter the world I shall think the same, I have no doubt.”

Lucy was rather surprised, and perhaps a little disappointed, when she found this wedding was not to take place immediately. Though she disapproved the match, still, as it was to be, why the sooner the better, particularly as she did not disapprove the idea of her own union being solemnized at the same time. The fear of Mr. Penruddock's disapprobation had kept Reuben and herself from openly proclaiming their attachment; but now, when Laura was to set the example, there could be no fear. They had delayed speaking of their residence, and those necessary affairs, but now it was imperative that they should settle their future plans, and Lucy found herself lending a willing ear to Reuben's schemes. They were to reside at the Grange, and Mr. and Mrs. Barwell would remove to Maple Hatch. Lucy was so deeply engaged with her own happy prospects, that she had no longer spare time to regret Evelyn was not Walter, and she forgave the boy, as she would call him when alone or with Reuben, that

this case, she was content to
the belief that her friend was
is that there are few, if any,
tinge of selfishness.

CHAPTER XIX.

In Venice Tasso's echoes are no more,
 And silent rows the songless gondolier ;
 Her palaces are crumbling to the shore,
 And music meets not always now the ear :
 Those days are gone, but beauty still is here.

ON their return to the north Sir Edward Meredith and Walter Rayland took the eastern side of Italy. They crossed the mountains of Calabria, and traced the shores of the Adriatic, making a long stay at Loretto, viewing the beauties of nature and the wonders of superstition. They then followed the route by Ancona and Ravenna, luxuriating in the combined views of the ocean and the Apennines, with their attendant and peculiar character. Our travellers were capable of appreciating the numberless charms that surrounded them, the eye was delighted by the unbounded prospect, the mind with the recollection of days long passed away,

days of good and evil. They had sufficient amusement and excitement till they reached Venice, where they proposed making a lengthened sojourn. The difference of age between Walter Rayland and Sir Edward was no bar to their friendship; a stranger, judging from manner and gaiety, might award the palm of seniority to the younger person, and a superficial observer would, perhaps, have declared the older the happier being. Both were gay, animated, and lovers of enjoyment; both appeared to seek amusement as a business, and to deserve the hilarity that accompanied their movements. Walter Rayland's was the exuberance of a healthy mind, which revelled in the enjoyment of the present, and looked forward with the delightful anticipation of increasing happiness. Sir Edward appeared equally generous, high-minded, and just; as candid as his companion, and more careless; each possessed an unbounded stock of good nature, and a continual flow of spirits; but in this respect Walter fell far short

of his friend, whose wild merriment sometimes bordered on extravagance. An acute observer would, perhaps, have doubted the reality of such exhilaration, and have suspected that it might be the endeavour to destroy thought, or blunt the edge of some painful feeling; but Walter had no idea of any reserve on the part of Sir Edward; he gave him full credit for being the very jocund, happy person he seemed to be, and he felt daily more rejoiced that they had been so strangely brought together.

A more intimate acquaintance did not diminish their friendship, and they were mutually pleased at the idea of their intercourse being continued some months longer at Venice, which in itself was not exactly calculated to please our forest hero. Its canals, bridges, palaces, and grandeur, with its pictures, sculpture, and even its ancient history, its associations, its legends, its fictions and its truths, were not in accordance with his taste or his feelings; he loved the woodland scenery, the forest dell, and the wide

open down. This rural propensity was created by the passion that will turn a wilderness into a Paradise—his days of infancy had passed among the wild charms of nature; a “bosky bourn” would not only remind him of her he loved so dearly, but it brought back the pastimes and haunts of his boyhood; every hour of his young life had abounded with pleasure, and his present disappointment was merely a temporary delay; his love would be successful, of that he felt assured. These thoughts were perpetually recurring to his mind, “loved one,” and her remembrance brought back the glades and the majestic oaks of Astol, the view, rendering the still and noiseless city, with its squares, churches, and magnificent architecture, dull and tame. How he longed to roam along the green sward,—it must be recalled that the green sward ever had Laura Penruddock as an appendage; but Walter recollected that he were in England he might not be permitted to range that chase at will; and the time spent

for his return had still months unexpired, when he was to join his family at Paris, so, as he could not have the forest maiden for his companion, he would, after her, prefer his merry friend; no one was so well calculated to make the moments fly, and dispel forbidden thoughts.

But though Walter occasionally sighed, we must not suppose he was dejected or unhappy—it was not his disposition to meet evils half way. He would not join Sir Edward in his praise of Venice, but he enjoyed the amusement as much as his friend; and at this particular time the Goddess of Gaiety appeared to have established her throne in the Venetian palaces, and on the lagunes and canals of this once-famed city. A young and beautiful heiress was the idol of attraction to the unmarried cavaliers of all nations; she doated on moonlight, water, and music; of course, her admirers had the same predilection; and balls, concerts, and water-parties, followed in quick succession. One fête led to another, each more splendid than the

last. The young lady knew her value, and she seemed determined to let her slaves know it also, for she ruled them with a high hand ; and they appeared to bow with submission to her decree. Among the foremost of her train was Sir Edward Meredith. This, at first, caused some surprise to Walter, not that he should propose, or be accepted by the lady ; but the letter which came so strangely to his knowledge, gave some intimation of his being a father, and he had certainly been married. Whether he was so still was more than Walter could determine, for the baronet never spoke of himself nor his family. When he first made acquaintance with Rayland, he candidly acknowledged a dislike to enter on the subject, and it had been mutually avoided. He had no doubt of Sir Edward being a widower, nor of his being admired by all who knew him—his extreme fascination, without his other advantages, might induce any youthful heart to return his love ;—but still it seemed a bold undertaking to enter the lists with nobles of the highest

, and of a corresponding age with the fair
and, besides, young and flattered maidens
ly choose one who has been wedded to
her.

he intimacy with the beautiful heiress caused
e slight separation between the friends. Sir
ard would loiter away many of the morning
s in her boudoir. Walter never chose to
mpany him in those early visits, preferring
ew those splendid churches and buildings
h, prejudice apart, really did merit the ut-
t admiration. When satiated with archi-
ural wonders, he would pace the open squares,
ander where he could wander. After his
tour of the city, he seldom entered the dis-
-looking gondolas, while the daylight per-
ed him to view the gloomy canals and dull
nes, which appeared to him only fit abodes
frogs and eels. He never felt any in-
ation to enter the most magnificent palace,
he damp, cold, slimy steps that led up to
n from the water; the very sight of them

gave him a shivering fit. It was all very well by night; and he had no objection to the interior of those superb and damp mansions; but he hated a canal—the very name gave him an idea of barges and lightermen, with the disagreeable accompaniments of locks, upsettings, drags, and tobacco; and to think of building a city on a mere mud-bank! The sea, too—to call that dull, heavy, compound of all that was villanous—the sea!—He thought of the white cliffs, and bold headlands of red rock that surrounded his own native land—the sea was there indeed—dashing and foaming among rocks and breakers—that was sea!—fresh, and green or blue, with its pure and healthy breeze!—how unlike this tame inland water. These were Walter's cogitations as he traversed those parts where there was a possibility of walking. But however he might dislike the day, and the dull manner of passing the morning, the evening and night more than compensated. Prejudiced as Walter was in favour of his own northern island,

he could not but allow the beauty of the moonlight nights, which were of themselves so lovely, and were now aided with every charm that wealth could bestow or create. The young heiress, in a splendid and illuminated gondola, never left the water while the bright planet rode in the clear sky. Her several admirers accompanied or followed her; and numerous bands of musicians kept the proper distance for the instruments to harmonize with the soothing sound created by the lulling of the waves and the gentle stroke of the oar. Now the clear, soft note of some syren would float on the ear,—then a grand chorus of melodious voices burst on the sense, like the music of the spheres. Walter could not resist the fascination, and he was compelled to acknowledge, that if Venice in daylight reminded him of purgatory, there was something almost heavenly on the canals at night. But then, as he very justly urged to Sir Edward, "It was not always so—there was not always wealth and beauty to set the young cavaliers at work to

invent new pleasures." Among others, they planned a morning excursion to an island containing a garden, where a collation was prepared, while mirth and gaiety abounded. It was a brilliant scene, the day was glorious, and the splendid dresses of the ladies vied with the beauties of nature ; while the clear blue sky reflected its hue on the water, that was literally alive with the beams of the sun : even Walter admitted it was delightful.

On this morning, Walter Rayland had been particularly struck with the devoted attention paid by Sir Edward to the heiress, and the mortified disappointment of the slighted suitors. When they returned to their lodgings, Walter, in the course of conversation, hinted at the good understanding that appeared to subsist between the young lady and his companion. Sir Edward at first parried the attack ; believing the subject to be far from disagreeable, he continued in the same strain, and dwelt upon the circumstance of the lady and Sir Edward having been seen

in close conversation through the windows of a gondola, and insisted that Sir Edward had directed the gondoliers to row far from the rest of the party.

"You had plenty of time," observed Rayland, "to make a proposal twice over, and no doubt the opportunity was not lost?"

"It was not, indeed," was the reply, the promptness of which rather surprised our young hero; and he congratulated the baronet on his success, and drank to the health of the future Lady Meredith, whom he pronounced to be the prettiest girl in Venice. Indeed, Walter could only recollect one who was her superior, and she certainly was not on Italian shores. The momentary recollection of Laura prevented him from observing the change that took place in the countenance of his companion, but when his thoughts returned from the forest and its inhabitant, he was struck with the strange alteration in the manner and appearance of Sir Edward: his features assumed an undefinable

expression. Walter had, at various periods, studied physiognomy, as well as phrenology, but his knowledge failed him in attempting to decipher the meaning of his friends undecipherable look; it was not to be defined; it was a "tablet of unutterable thoughts," and not of pleasing ones; it was so far the contrary, that Walter felt it would be charity to end a meditation that appeared to cast a night-mare on the mind; it was an incubus on the feelings, and our hero strove to dispel it by inquiring if he felt unwell. He received no answer, but the motive succeeded, the spell seemed to pass gradually away, and the handsome features of Sir Edward assumed their general aspect. Walter had so far participated in the feelings of his companion that, as the cloud receded, a weight also left his own mind, and a heavy sigh now called the attention of Sir Edward, when he repeated the question just uttered by his friend, without being aware that the inquiry had been so lately put to himself.

"I am quite well," said Walter, attempting to laugh, "but really you alarmed me."

"I am sorry for that, but I am not aware of having spoken for the last ten minutes."

"Nor have you; it was your silence that gave me alarm."

"I have heard of the silence of solitude being awful, but I did not suppose a silent companion would have the same effect. You have not often to complain of me in that respect," said Sir Edward, laughing, and increasing the surprise of Walter, by the ease with which he resumed the usual merriment of his general manner; and the idea that the strange forgetfulness of the baronet was connected with the previous conversation, passed away from the mind of our hero, while he again returned to the subject of the young heiress. After some gentle raillery on Walter's part, Sir Edward suddenly interrupted him by asking "If he ever read that interesting book called 'The Peerage,' and its companion, containing the list of baronets?"

"Why, yes, I do sometimes; though, as no prospect of being one myself, it is not so interesting to me."

"As you have perused its pages, did you chance to notice that on such a day, in such a year, Sir Edward Meredith was united to Joanna Montani, being then in his thirtieth year?"

"Oh, I knew you had been married on that event that made us friends acquainted with that fact. But pardon me, I distress myself recalling the memory of one you have lost."

"You are right," said Sir Edward, with a wild laugh, while the fearful expression that had just passed away, again took a momentary possession of his countenance; it was instantaneous, the laugh was appalling, and Walter never again to hear so strange an attempt at mirth.

"You are right," he exclaimed, "I have lost one—one I dearly, tenderly loved; but not," he continued, as a convulsive shudder passed

his frame, "but not by death. You drank to the health of Lady Meredith, she is living, and may thank you at some future time."

A deep silence succeeded, which was broken by Sir Edward, who, to Walter's great astonishment, appeared to have lost all recollection of what had occurred, as he jestingly alluded to the suitors of the young heiress, and reminded Walter that it was time to keep their evening engagement at the palace of the lady. When here, no one could have supposed Sir Edward Meredith had ever experienced one emotion, except those of mirth and gaiety. It was altogether above Walter Rayland's comprehension; the short explanation of the baronet had cast a gloom on his spirits, which he felt would not quickly subside; while the person, whose look of mingled agony, anger, and despair had caused his depression, was the centre of a brilliant circle, giving life and animation to all who saw him, as he then was, the apparent personification of happiness.

Walter Rayland had seen life only in its summer garb, all with him had been gay and blooming; he had heard and read of persons whose breaking hearts might belie the smile on their lips, but these had never come under his observation, and so little had he seen of sorrow, that he almost doubted the reality of woe, till the extraordinary expression of Sir Edward Meredith's features spoke too plainly that anguish was known and endured. When Walter turned from the remembrance of the morning scene, and now saw the chief actor gay, animated, and amusing, with all eyes intent on him, for the diversion of the hour, he could almost have persuaded himself that he had experienced an unpleasant dream. But these feelings at length gave way; the remembrance of Sir Edward's emotion also faded, and the friends pursued their gay career for some time without interruption.

The first event of any importance, after this slight mention of Lady Meredith, was the

riage of the young heiress to one whom she long loved ; but jealous of the affection of her son, and fearing her wealth might have undue influence, she had with Sir Edward's assistance, to whom she was distantly related, conceived a plan which succeeded happily, and contented her anxious mind that she was really doing good for herself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Thou seest not all ; but piecemeal thou must
To separate contemplation, the great whole ;
And as the ocean many bays will make,
That ask the eye—so here condense thy soul
To more immediate object.

“ WHAT spirit of perversity prompted
ter, to choose the long and tedious road
on your route to England ?” demanded
ward, as they were reposing after a
on the evening before they separate
homeward.

“ The same demon of opposition to
your choice by Bordeaux,” returned

“ But I have taste and novelty of
the beautiful shores of the Garonne
so familiar to either as the fatiguing
road from Dijon to Calais.”

“ I can only plead duty in excuse,
admit you are correct in your argu-

way you propose taking is altogether new to me."

"What has duty to do with it?"

"Everything;—my father and mother intend giving me the meeting at Paris, and they absolutely require my aid; more particularly after so long an absence. Now you have no obligation of the kind."

"Why, yes, I have something like it, having engaged to stay some time with an old friend at Thoulouse;—so we must say farewell till you keep your promise, and help beat my preserves in September."

"You may depend on my being punctual, particularly as you have been so lavish in praise of the wild sports of your Northumberland estate."

"You will find Merry Wood Dale equal to any manor in England:—the moors abound with birds, while for otters and badgers you will not meet better sport in any part of our sea-bound isle. But the principal seat of our family is in

Hampshire. I am not very partial to it, but it well seldom boasts the presence of its kind in a fine place notwithstanding, and it is being held in more favour, particularly in the early part of my life was spent there; but for the last twelve or fourteen years it has been neglected. Now I am going to make it *honorable*, by returning at an earlier date than I at first intended, and thus to spend some sport at Merry Wood."

"Your northern seat has a wondrous name!"

"Yes, and we contrive to make it a name. Some old-fashioned antiquarian who lived at Merry Wood, made out, to his satisfaction, that Merry Wood and Penruddock are one and the same—that one was derived from the other; but I forget which he gives the paternity; he certainly does not reversing them. It will make no difference. I hope, to you, if we change the scene of our skill in Hampshire; if you li

scenery, you will admire the neighbourhood of Westwell."

Walter did not express the delight this proposal gave him, but he promptly replied,

"I am at your command—and I shall hope to spend as pleasant an autumn as I did there some twenty months ago."

"Then you know the New Forest?—at Mr. Delaval's—were you with him?"

"No; he was with me!—If you were ten years older, I should fear to tell you what fools we were, or how we set up a gipsy camp, with all the luxuries of Grosvenor Square."

"Then I suppose you enacted Robin Hood; save and except in the matter of taking purses?"

"We enacted the dress: we were a set of fancy-ball foresters; admirably well equipped, as far as externals went, but no more calculated for real denizens of the dingle and glade, than I am for Lord Chancellor;—not but what our forest-life was one that even Little John and his compeers might not have disdained to share.

There was a sprinkling of romance, too, about it, which made it highly agreeable."

"Romance in the New Forest!—You should have ranged its brother, the Black, for that!"

"That was too far off—out of our beat;—we were regular fools though, and regularly annoyed, till we moved into the neighbourhood of Astol."

"Of Astol!—Astol Manor House?"

"The same. You know it of course; an inhabitant of that part can scarcely help being familiar with all places in the vicinity."

Sir Edward Meredith made no reply to the remark, and Walter put his observation in the form of a query, when, receiving no answer, he looked at his companion, and to his surprise, almost dismay, he found Sir Edward was in the same state of mental abstraction as when they had spoken of Lady Meredith. At that time the emotion did not surprise, though it might shock;—it was natural that an injured husband should feel anguish at the remembrance of a

faithless wife, and such she must be, to be living, and yet lost to one who seemed to feel so deeply. At the present time they were not speaking of her, and Walter could only conclude Sir Edward was unwell, and immediately he proffered his assistance.

"I thank you," was the reply; "I am quite well; it is only a spasm, with which I am occasionally troubled; it is going off. You were speaking of your residence in the New Forest—by—by Astol Manor House?"

Again Walter's attention was fixed, but, at the same time, he endeavoured to keep this observation from his companion;—the words appeared to be forced, by some compulsive effort, from his lips. Feeling for the agitation which Sir Edward evidently struggled to subdue, Rayland made an attempt to change the conversation, which, however, the baronet himself continued, saying,

"This subject has some interest for me, Mr. Rayland; will you oblige me by speaking of—

of—the forest?—Were you near the Manor House?”

“Close to the park paling.”

“Of course, then, you made the acquaintance of the family residing there?—that is, supposing you were not intimate before?”

“I was not aware of there being such a place. Delaval knew it by name—and the Lord of the Manor likewise, by name,—but no further.”

“Still, being gentlemen, and so near his dwelling, he must, had it been only to maintain his character for hospitality, have invited you to his mansion; without,” said Sir Edward, attempting to laugh—but it was a ghastly attempt—“without he took you for real vagrants, and so gave an order for your removal,—not, I hope, to the stocks!”

“No, indeed; Mr. Penruddock never honoured us in any way by his notice. We made many inquiries in the neighbourhood, and all we could learn was, that the whole family lived in the most secluded and retired way. So we

set him down either for a miser or a misanthrope!"

"Then you did not see William Penruddock?" The voice in which these simple words were uttered almost made Walter start; it was so strange—so wild—so unlike the usual gay tones of his companion. Instead of eliciting a speedy answer, it had a contrary effect; and Sir Edward, in a more subdued tone, repeated the demand, to which Walter, as if waking from a dream, replied,

"Oh yes, before I left Hampshire I was domiciled with Mr. Penruddock and his family. If you like to listen to a tale of robbers and midnight freaks, I will recount what befel me at that antique mansion."

"You will oblige me infinitely by so doing; and as a wild tale sounds better in the dark, we will extinguish our lamps, and enjoy your wonders with what little light the clouds will permit the moon to give, it will be quite in unison with tales of blood and murder."

"My story goes not so far," said Walter, "fortunately we dispensed with the murder; but it was a thrilling night notwithstanding, and one that will be never forgotten by me."

He then recounted the first meeting they had with the maidens of Astol, in the forest glade, and proceeded, without the slightest interruption from Sir Edward, till his final departure from the Manor House; only one circumstance did he omit, which was the introduction of Evelyn to the notice of Mr. Penruddock. Not being aware of the connexion between the boy and the person who was listening to his relation, he passed over the whole account of the gipsy lad, as irrelative to the story. Not the slightest remark or question was uttered by Sir Edward; he listened in such deep silence that Walter, at one time, was almost disposed to fancy he was displaying his powers of elocution to a sleeping auditor; but when he recalled the agitating expression of the baronet's countenance, the idea vanished, and he continued and finished

his tale without interruption. "Now," said he, as he ended his recital, "you have the full account of my sojourn at the abode of beauty and seclusion."

"Have you named all the inhabitants of Astol Manor House?" enquired Sir Edward, in a tone of voice still more appalling, still more unearthly, than when he put his former question.

A sudden light appeared to break on the mind of Walter. Could the lady he saw at Reuben Barwell's be the wife of his companion, and was Mr. Penruddock the betrayer of his happiness? That would account for the strange emotion exhibited by Sir Edward Meredith, and for his present question; but would it accord with the extreme benevolence and rigid morality of Mr. Penruddock, which he had heard so highly lauded by his domestics, all of whom seemed patterns of strict virtue and propriety? It was quite inconsistent with what he had seen or heard while at Astol. From his own

observation he should say, if ever there was a man devoid of guilt or worldly passions, it was Mr. Penruddock. Still the best of men were but mortals, and all were liable to err; but then again, his devoted love to his wife, which he had heard almost amounted to idolatry, how could that fact be reconciled with his being the betrayer of innocence? To be sure, Walter had heard of hypocrisy, and Mr. Penruddock might be a hypocrite; but he could not harbour that idea more than a moment: Mr. Penruddock was no hypocrite, he would venture his life on that fact. These thoughts passed through his mind with the rapidity of lightning, and he only appeared to be considering the question of his companion before he answered—"That he had named every one that he had either seen or heard mentioned at the Manor House."

A pause ensued in the conversation, which neither seemed disposed to break; both were intently occupied with their own reflections, and the scene was well calculated to promote medi-

tation. The moon being in its first quarter and merely a crescent, now faintly gleamed through a cloud, and then beamed with brilliancy on the water; while the soft notes of a lute occasionally heard from a neighbouring mansion, and the gentle dash of the oars as the gondolas passed softly and swiftly by, alone gave notice that there were other beings in existence besides themselves.

Sir Edward was the first to break the stillness which had gained full possession of them, and speaking in his usual cheerful manner, he said, "You have been telling me a tale of romance, which I foresee will end, as most romances do, in settlements and marriage. You will be a happy man," he continued, while his voice again altered, "if the heiress of Astol should resemble her mother."

"You knew her mother?" enquired Walter, more from the necessity of replying to his companion, than feeling any immediate interest on the subject.

" Florence Stanley
together ; my home wa
Heaven grant that her
happier than her own."

" I understood she d
Mr. Penruddock had
That was misery to him
she has escaped, perha

" You are rather yo
turned Sir Edward, wi
" Florence Stanley de
earth."

take the first opportunity of retiring; the conversation was painful to both, though why it should be so was more than he could explain. After waiting a few moments he remarked that it was getting late, and proposed retiring, rising at the same time to summon their attendants; but Sir Edward requested he would remain, adding, "Allow me time for recollection, and I will explain why the name of Penruddock, and the mention of Astol, should affect me in the strange manner you have witnessed."

Walter resumed his chair, and he almost wished some interruption would occur; there was an awful impressiveness in the voice and words of Sir Edward, that was sufficient to deaden, if not destroy, curiosity; it was a feeling that the hearer would be drawn in to be a participator in the woes that were to be recited, as if, in the case of Eve, sorrow and sin would follow upon the footsteps of knowledge; but Walter felt it would be cowardly to recede, and therefore he determined to listen in silence. It was not a very brief space before Sir Edward thus

addressed him :—" There is a singular manner by which we have been brought together, that makes me almost imagine some fate attending our intimacy; otherwise account for the irresistible now have, to relate the events of my early life. I feel impelled to this conversation: it probably does, arise from the circumstance of your having been an inmate at Astol; let the motive be what it may that prompts me to this relation, if you do not object, I can no longer have cause for wonder, as I have perceived you do at many parts of my life. In return for your tale of romance, you will find me one of guilt, credulity, and misery."

Sir Edward appeared to have composed his emotion as he recounted his story to Walter Rayland, which will perhaps interest the reader if it be recorded in his person.

END OF VOLUME II.

LONDON:
WILLIAM CLOWES, Duke-street, Lambeth.



PENRUDDOCK.

—

VOL. III.



P E N R U D D O C K,

A TALE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF 'WALTZBURGH.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

V O L. III.

LONDON:

WHITTAKER & CO., AVE MARIA-LANE.

1835.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY WILLIAM C
Duke-street, Lambet

PENRUDDOCK.

CHAPTER I.

A tale of woe, while others sleep,
I'll tell to thee—and thou wilt weep ;
'Twill mar thy peace for many a day,
And drive all cheerful thoughts away.
—Then wilt thou hear this mournful tale ?

THE inhabitants of Astol Manor and Westwell Park had been for many centuries on the most friendly terms; marriages and intermarriages frequently took place between them; the connexion was so often renewed, and the cordiality of relations so well preserved, that in course of time they appeared to consider themselves as one family. Residing in a thinly-inhabited part of the county, they were near neighbours, no estate intervening to cause dissension by numbers; and the happy terms of familiarity which years only appeared to cement, made any event

that occurred in one mansion, a source of joy or sorrow in the other.

The grandfather of the present owner of Westwell Park had, late in life, married the daughter of the Earl of Cressmore;—he did not long enjoy the happiness of seeing an infant heir, who, by the death of his father, was left to the care and guardianship of his mother. The affections of Lady Mary Meredith had not been consulted in her union with Sir Evelyn; and when her second year of widowhood had expired, she was again united to one whom she had loved with youthful fervour. But Lady Mary was not fated to be happy in the marriage state: she was again a mother; and soon after she had to mourn the loss of him who had been ever dear to her. Sir James Stanley was long and deeply lamented by his young widow, who devoted her time to the education of her children, residing with them alternately on the respective estates, till they married, when she retired to the small dwelling at Woodend, thin

ing to pass the remainder of her days in the neighbourhood of her sons, and sufficiently near to enjoy the society of both; the seat of her son Sir George Stanley being also in Hampshire, though not in the Forest.

Lady Mary was not permitted very long to remain in this secluded state; death appeared to be busy with her connexions;—a lapse of five years saw Sir George Stanley the father of a lovely girl, and a widower. Sir Henry Meredeth, her other son, had been married long before his brother, and for some years there was no prospect of a successor; at length, to the joy of all, the lady of Sir Henry was the mother of a son; but her health was so injured, that the only chance of preserving her life was declared by her physicians to be change of air and scene. To save the life of the woman he tenderly loved, Sir Henry relinquished his native home, and sought in other climes to establish the health of one dearer than his own. He so far succeeded, that Lady Meredeth lived many years an invalid,

but was never sufficiently well to travel to the land ; indeed, the warm climate was deemed absolutely necessary to her.

A more than brotherly affection existed between the sons of Lady Mary Stanley. When Sir Henry Meredith left his paternal company to his wife, it was arranged that Stanley, with his mother, should remain with the little Edward Meredith, who was to inherit his mother's delicacy of constitution. As he was considered unequal to the fatigues of travelling. As he increased in age, he improved, and when his uncle and father visited him, in his tenth year, to visit his mother, he could scarcely recognize the sickly child who had left, in the fine manly boy who now supported his delicate mother with vigour, health and spirits. Lady Meredith was blessed with a daughter since she was married, and the quiet, gentle girl was more valued than with the habits of an invalid, than the noisy boy, whose spirits were in

and, proud as the mother was of her son, and dearly as she loved him, she willingly consented to his returning to England to pursue his studies, under a promise from Sir George of frequent visits to Italy.

In consequence of this separation, arrangements were made for Sir George Stanley, his daughter, Lady Mary, and her grandson to reside alternately at Westwell Park and at Sir George Stanley's estates, where they composed one family, with the addition of Miss, or rather Mrs. Aubrey, a cousin of Lady Mary's, who had been brought up in the family, and was beloved and esteemed by every member of it. She was the gentlest and kindest of human beings,—but our readers have already been introduced to her by the narrative of the young Evelyn.

Years passed away in peace and happiness at Westwell Park or Stanley Hall. Their only cause for sorrow was the separation from the heads of the Meredeth family, and that grievance was lessened to the young Edward, by his frequent, though short visits to the continent.

Time, which has no respect either for goodness or grandeur, had not spared the good and amiable Lady Mary Stanley; though well in health, she was feeble in body, and at last it was found necessary to have a fixed abode. She was not equal to the removal from one part of the county to another, and Westwell Park was selected for their constant residence. It was dear to all, Sir George Stanley had been reared in its groves, and each person in the party had some local reason for a preference; with many it was preferred from its vicinity to Astol: the families of the Park and Manor House had lived in such constant friendship, that the very idea of that intimacy being interrupted by a final removal, was felt as a serious grievance. Mr. and Mrs. Penruddock were most attached friends to Lady Mary and Sir George Stanley, and their only son William was the constant playfellow of the young Edward and Florence.

When the Westwell family had decided on making the Park their constant residence, Wil-

liam Penruddock had just passed his thirteenth year, Edward Meredith was in his twelfth, and Florence Stanley was still younger, and a happier trio could scarcely be found; nor was it possible to meet three more indulged or petted children, each the idol of their respected friends. The heads of the Penruddock family had rather more discretion in their fondness than Sir Henry and Lady Mary, who appeared to live only to promote the pleasure of Edward and Florence;—as for Mrs. Aubrey, it was in her nature to love everybody. “She could not help it,” she said, “everybody was kind to her, and she must love them in return—and to love was to comply with every whim or desire.”

It has been remarked, that uniform indulgence is not nearly so destructive to the temper of children as alternate fits of fondness and severity. Perhaps it might be owing to this constant indulgence that the dispositions of the young trio were preserved:—they were a cheerful, sometimes noisy, riotous group, whom no

one ever thought of contradicting. scarcely ever separated, apartment pared at each mansion for the inhal other, so that dark evenings and might be no interruption to their Sir Henry and Mr. Penruddock themselves with chess, while Lad Mrs. Penruddock had always ple relating to their youthful days. M delight was to be admitted among group, and often would she return dress to the elder branches of the f first serious interruption to the fe family at Westwell was the deat Meredith. She was most sincerely every member of their house, but st nantly than if she had always r them.

The second grief to Florence and was when William Penruddock and Edward left the Forest for Oxford. however, softened to the young lady

visits to town, for the benefit of masters, and the delight with which they met at the vacations almost compensated for the grief of parting.

At college, William and Edward were the same inseparable friends they had ever been; numbers made no difference; they were as firmly attached as when Florence were their only companion; and yet, in some respects, no two could have been more unlike; both were high-spirited, generous, and good-tempered; but the impetuous, ardent disposition of Edward was a direct contrast to the cheerful, but rather grave and reflecting Penruddock. Florence would say their characters were both improved by the opposite tendency of his companion—the animation of Edward kept William in proper tone, while the fire of the young Meredeth was subdued by the prudence of his friend to a more tempered heat. In all the disputes that occurred, and they were numerous, between Florence and Edward, William was always ap-

pointed umpire, and his decision was ever admitted to be just.

At length the time arrived when their studies were ended, and they returned to the Forest. Florence had just passed her sixteenth year, and a more lovely girl was never seen, either in a court or in a forest ;—she was formed for each, and was equally attractive in her woodland garb, or in the splendid costume in which she was presented at St. James's. Her young companions were also improved in manly and courtly grace, and the young heart of Florence bounded with delight, when she heard the praises that were bestowed on them by all those who had been concerned in their education. The hours flew rapidly at Astol and Westwell, and the only difference was, that the young people were left more to themselves. Mrs. Aubrey was no longer able to enter into their sports, a lameness in one foot prevented her from galloping with them along the forest glades, or joining their dance at night.

It was the first wish of Lady Mary and her sons, that Edward and Florence should be united; but they used every precaution to keep their intention secret; they knew how often projected unions were marred by the too evident pains of the relatives to promote what they so ardently desire. Florence never suspected their design; but Edward was more keen-sighted; however, he was also prudent, and he kept his knowledge secret; but though his own wish accorded with his parents, he yet believed the union would never take place.

There was another heart that divined the intention and hope of Lady Mary and Sir Henry;—from the eye of true love what can be concealed? William Penruddock from his earliest years had felt his every wish, his every future dream of bliss point to the dear companion of his childhood; if she were not the partner of his destiny, life would have no charm for him: as his growth increased so did his affection, and when on his return from Oxford, he

too plainly perceived the intention of the friends of Florence, his long-cherished hopes of happiness appeared to vanish and fade for ever. True love is ever timid, and when he saw the fine form and animated countenance of Edward Meredith, he shrunk from the comparison. William Penruddock was not just to himself; though not so handsome, his person was equally fine, his demeanour as dignified, and there was a quiet grace in his manner as attractive as the more lively movements of his friend; but he saw not himself, he saw his rival, with numberless advantages, and the parents of Florence to aid his cause. What was there then for him? only to lament his fate in silence, and pray for the happiness of those so dear to him; he never supposed the possibility of Edward's not being equally enamoured,—not to love Florence Stanley seemed out of all human probability,—to prefer another, incredible.

"I have been thinking, Florence," said Edward one day, when by chance they were alone

" I have been thinking how very unsentimental you are."

" I unsentimental ! Why, I looked at the moon for full five minutes last night."

" Indeed !"

" Yes, indeed ! And, more than that, I gazed full as long at the waves when we were last on the beach, and the sea was rough."

" Wonderful ! What next ?"

" And I thought how very like the waves were to the flock of geese old Martha keeps on the common."

" What a comparison, geese to the sublime waves !"

" There was a very great resemblance ; the waves tumbled over a mass of rock, in lumps of white foam just like——"

" Geese ?"

" Yes, just like Martha's geese, as they run over the brook."

" Not run, waddle."

" Well, waddle," said Florence, laughing.

"and now never accuse me again of sentimental."

"I was going to include myself time."

"Were you? oh, that alters the then, tell me why you have passed yourself,—what are the signs?"

"Why, first and foremost, we have long months at home since we left; you have never written a sonnet to my beauty, nor have I fought half yours."

"But is it part of my duty to write to the honour of your whiskers, though I know they are very well arranged, and your curls, and your dress altogether, I know quite correct; but as to writing sonnets to my beauty, that is the devoir of the lady."

"Well then, I have not done it; I sigh when you depart, nor groan when you return, on William Penruddock."

"That is courtly breeding," said Florence, laughing, while at the same time a slight colour deepened the roses on her cheeks, which delicate tinge did not pass unobserved by her companion, "and," she continued, "quite right, for verily I should be sorry if I were obliged to frown on William Penruddock."

"But it is all very unsentimental though."

"Well, then, do give me a lesson in sentiment."

"I do not believe I shall shine in that line, as the shopkeepers say at Oxford."

"Heavens! Sentiments and shops! Oh, Edward!"

"Well, as I am going to the land of sentiment, and on a sentimental occasion, perhaps I shall return ready to sigh and swear your charms surpass all others."

"Ah, how sorry I am you are going! And when do you leave Westwell?"

"Next week."

"So soon! Take care of yourself, and remem-

ber how many there are who love y
land ; this is a truth, dear Edward,
sentiment in this."

This was the first separation th
after the young men left Oxford, and
casioned by Sir Edward being su
Italy, to attend his sister's wedd
Mercedeth had remained with her fa
was really her native clime, and she
be married to a Neapolitan noble
she had long loved. This event, w
joyful one to the young Julia, was
lowed by the death of her father, wh
some years in a declining state. A
ceremony over, the Count and Coun
accompanied by her brother, now
retired to an estate in the country,
remaining some considerable time, &
returned to England.

A few mornings after the arrival of
baronet at Westwell, Florence enter
where he was examining some paper

Florence," said he, "is some music, which Julia gave me to bring you; being Italian you must like it, and, being really pretty you will, so while I read these papers you can practise the airs."

"Surely that will disturb your reading?"

"Oh, these papers are of no consequence, and if they were, I should understand them better while sweet music was floating round."

"Trying a new piece can scarcely be called sweet music, but you can tell me if I interfere with your reading."

Florence went to the harp, and Sir Edward, for a short space, appeared occupied with his papers; his companion was so soon engrossed with the novelties before her, that she forgot her cousin was in the room, and when, after he had replaced his documents, he remained motionless, with his eyes fixed on her countenance, she was totally unconscious of his observation.

The mansion of Westwell was a direct contrast to the Manor House at Astol; as far as

comfort went they were on an equality, but the dwelling of Sir Edward Meredith was an elegant modern structure, and the apartment in which Florence and Edward were occupied, one with the harp and the other with his thoughts, contained every charm which wealth could purchase, or luxury invent: a large window opened on a stone balustrade, commanding an extensive prospect; while plants of various hues and size encircled the frame-work, and gave additional beauty and gaiety to a room already gay and beautiful. The softened light that beamed through the plants and flowers fell on the form of Florence, as she leaned over the harp, and it seemed to cast a radiance on a face and figure that Edward, as he reclined on a couch at some distance, thought was not excelled, if equalled, by the forms of fancy which he had so often contemplated in the works of art in Italy.

So intent was the young lady on the music she was practising, that she paid no attention to the movements of her companion,

when he slowly rose and reached her side, she heeded him not, till he removed the ringlets from her brow, saying——

“ You are very pretty, Florence.”

“ Indeed,” said she, laughing and startled, “ did you find that out in your papers, or did you go to Italy for your knowledge?”

“ Perhaps my last visit to Italy might give me a clearer perception of your extreme loveliness.”

“ I was only pretty just now; you improve in compliments.”

“ As you do in beauty. But I was not so much considering your attraction, as endeavouring to find what style of beauty suited my particular taste.”

“ Have you decided?”

“ Not quite. Which do you prefer, black eyes or blue?”

“ Really, the question is of such importance, it requires more time than I am inclined to bestow.”

"What a beautiful blue yours are almost a purple! and your hair! I have so rich a brown, without the slightest tinge of auburn,—it is the finest colour I ever saw. Do give me a lock, and I will have it dyed the exact shade; it will make the perfect tune, and he will ever after supply me with the words."

"The Lord of Westwell to be indited by a tailor for a coat!" said Florence, laughing.

"But tell me, Florence, which colour do you prefer,—in the way of eyes, I mean?"

"Why, not exactly either of you. I think I like dark grey,—neither blue nor grey."

"I thought so."

The tone in which these words were spoken caused Florence to look earnestly at him, and then her eyes fell to the ground. A deep blush passed over her face. She turned and left her side and walked into the balcony. He remained for a few minutes silent and thoughtful. Florence continued in the apart-

the contagion appeared to extend its influence ; she was equally abstracted. After a time, which either would have thought long, had they not both been equally absorbed, Sir Edward again approached her, saying,

“ I could love you dearly, Florence.”

“ Could, dear Edward ! I hope you do love me dearly ; if you do not, you are very ungrateful, for I love you very dearly !”

“ And so do I, in the way you mean ; but I could love you very differently.”

At those words Florence attempted, first to laugh ; the effort failed, and she turned deadly pale. Sir Edward, in great alarm, took her hand, when the deep hue of the rose again usurped the lily. “ My sweetest cousin, how you frightened me ! You are better now, I see you are ; but come in the balcony ; here is a chair, and I will sit by you, if you will let me, and let me also talk at the same time.” Florence gasped for breath. “ My dear Florence,” continued her companion, “ why are you so agi-

tated?—there, you have a gentle zep
your snowy brow. Now, if you an
will tell you, that I love you too c
willingly to cause you one momen
You shall never accuse Edward M
selfishness. Florence, I know you
know your heart is not at your own d
must not be your lover, I will be y
and as a brother strive to promote you

As Sir Edward spoke she gazed at
feigned astonishment; at first, as if
prehending; as he proceeded, her var
told her consciousness, and when he c
agitated girl attempted to speak, but
the effort, and burst into tears. It
siderable time before her kind-heart
nion could soothe her into composure:
some manner he had succeeded, Fl
broken accents, said,

“Dearest Edward, I thank you for y
ness; but you know not the mortific
pain I suffer, at this moment.” And
tears fell fast.

"Mortification!—pain! Dear Florence, why should you feel either? Affection for one worthy of your love ought not to give pain; you should rather be proud of having sufficient discernment to appreciate the value of William Penruddock."

"Hush! hush, Edward! For Heaven's sake do not speak so loud, or you will drive me wild! Do not say I love any one."

"Then I should speak false, my sweet friend, if——"

"Oh, be my friend indeed! and if I have ever given cause for your surmise, help me to guard the secret from all, but most from him."

"Fear not,—I will never forget the delicacy of my sister;—but why you should feel so anxious—surely, Florence, you have no spice of coquetry about you?"

"Coquetry!—You would not have me love one who has never given me cause to suppose he had the slightest partiality for me, more than friendship?"

"Oh, is that all?" said Edward, laughing—

when, pitying the agitation of his companion, he refrained, saying, "Fear not my prudence, William shall never have a hint from me;—but Florence, will you attend to my secret? If you would not listen to my tale of love in the first person, so now I will tell you of it in the second:—there are a pair of black eyes at Naples—I must not say they smiled on me, for I fear you should think lightly of the possibility, but they did not frown:—there are other charms added to these bright orbs. I shall return shortly to Naples, will you wish me success? and, if I do not fail, will you receive the lady your cousin?"

"Dearest Edward," said Florence, catching his hand and pressing it between her fingers, "for your sake I will love her dearly; she shall be what I have long wished for—the sister of my heart!"

A tear of pleasure sprung to the bright eyes of Florence, and gave sincerity to her words, and it almost made Edward repent, and regret

generosity. The thought was momentary ;—he would never rival his friend ; and if he were to attempt, he had no chance of success. That Florence loved William Penruddock was perfectly clear to him ; and that her love was returned was also evident. Edward had long seen the affection that subsisted between his friends, and long felt the prudence of guarding his feelings. Fortunately for all parties, he was introduced to a young Neapolitan, the intimate friend of his sister ; and this lady's evident partiality had assisted him in the struggle, and it was no slight one, as he told Florence—" he could have loved her most sincerely ;"—he did love her most truly ; but still he had not felt the passion with the full fervour of his ardent disposition. That he had yet to learn, nor was he long in acquiring it after his return to Naples. Still, at this present period he loved his fair cousin the best in the world ; and it was no slight effort of generosity to promote, as he did, the union between her and William Penruddock.

CHAPTER 1

The mind can
Substance, and people planet
With beings brighter than h
A breath to forms which can

FLORENCE was so delighted
reposed in her by her cousin
got the unpleasant sensation
previous remarks; and a
when Sir George Stanley ca
look at some papers in the
Aubrey was engaged with La
she joined William Penrudd
—he had left the room on
whisper low to his cousin.
through the open window,
beside Penruddock without t

features of Florence, as she replied to the whisper in a tone equally low; and yet it was a view well worthy his contemplation—the varied prospect from the small terrace that was formed over some of the lower apartments caused it to be the favourite sitting-room of the family. Beyond the foreground, which was a richly-wooded lawn and park, the country spread with every charm of rural scenery: the arm of the sea, that separates the mainland from the Isle of Wight, appearing from this point of view like a broad and beautiful lake. The night was calm and of a tempting coolness, most delightful after a warm day;—the moon was little more than a silver line, and merely served to show the water below;—the stars shone out with peculiar brightness, as if rejoicing in the departure of the luminary who so often eclipsed their splendour: two brilliant planets were proudly conspicuous, as if endeavouring to rival each other in the eye of the beholder, giving fresh interest to that view which is ever new and ever sublime.

Even without the scene below was vistas, or breaks in forms of the village to be visible; the beauty to many a farm; while the village windows gave distant landscape: house or yard-dog with the soft sigh that peculiar feeling mind when viewing tion, which is as needless, for all pleasing sensation scene of this kind, the attempt would who now leaned on enjoyed the luxury remained some time the lady was the

liam Penruddock known who was by his side, possibly his reverie might have ended sooner; as it was, Florence was the first to break the stillness, by inquiring,

“If his meditations were on Heaven or earth?”

“At that moment,” he replied, “they were on neither exactly; but on something partaking of both!”

How apt all are, particularly those in love, to fancy a meaning in words which, perhaps, were never intended by the speaker. Florence felt a faint glow in her cheeks as she interpreted the words to her own satisfaction. She turned her face more away from the lights that peered through the casement; her care was needless, William was the last person to explain a blush in his own favour; but he saw it not, and Florence continued the conversation. “How often, Mr. Penruddock, we have gazed on this landscape, and yet it is ever new and beautiful!”

Her companion did not immediately answer;

the name by which she addressed him, sent a chill to his heart. "Was it intended to give me all hope, even if he were presumed to enter the lists with one of such superior strength more than double his rent-roll? 'beware?' She had never addressed him in formal manner, save on formal occasions in public; it must be intended for him. Sir Edward Meredith knew more than his friend, and he would have been more confident, but Edward was not so confident for his sensitive friend. The doubting lover sighed, as he answered.

"We have indeed, Florence;—I cannot bring myself to follow you, but I will be long ere I shall learn to do so as Stanley."

"Do not attempt it, dear Will; I know not how the word escaped me."

"It would be a hard lesson, but I am taking the hand she offered, and I am doing so fervently."

“ We were speaking of this prospect,” said Florence. “ At this distance I love to hear the bark of those faithful guards, and to watch the lights as they move about in yonder hamlet; they give me the idea of every sort of comfort, from that of the substantial farmer to the lowly cottager; they all speak of peace, if not happiness.”

“ In this particular district those lights will really bear that interpretation, though in every place they give me an idea something resembling yours; yet not all, for look at yon light in the far distance, beyond the sea, in the island. There is another meaning for that lamp.”

“ Ah, I see: you mean the smuggler’s light! Well, that does not speak of misery; and after all I cannot think so hardly of those poor men as some of our county neighbours do. There is a bold bearing about them, and except in their particular sort of—what shall I call it—not crime, they are good and respectable people,

acting their part well on all other occasions; and they would not defraud any single person. I don't know whether it is the interest those distant lights give, or whether it is because I hear my maid advocate their cause, but I really cannot consider them as I fear I ought to do."

"It is well for society, Florence, that you do not advocate other despisers of the law; you would have many converts, and have more to answer for than you might desire. But do you really imagine happiness may be found in humble life?"

"Undoubtedly; and perhaps more perfect than when encumbered with the requisite attention which grandeur and state demand."

"And could you be happy in one of those humble dwellings, down in yonder vale?"

"Why, perhaps, for one of those comfortable brick-and-mortar houses, where the mistress attends to the domestic concerns, I might answer as Juliana did, 'That education had

spoiled me for it.' But, to come nearer home, I do not consider it necessary to happiness, or even comfort, that every mansion should possess the elegancies and luxuries of this house, or rather palace. I sometimes wish we were not quite so grand; how merry we are at Woodend when we go there for a frolic, without so many servants; and Astol, there can be no comparison between the grandeur of Westwell and the Manor House; but your dwelling gives me so perfect a conception of comfort, that I sometimes incline to believe our ancestors understood the real nature of the word, even better than we do, with all our modern inventions, which sometimes take away from what they are intended to give."

Florence was not aware what an emotion her words caused. Penruddock made no reply, and they soon after were called from the balcony.

The antique Manor House never appeared half so dear to the mind of its master as when

he next entered it. Florence had thought it more comfortable than Westwell. Then Florence would not scorn the smaller fortune he had to offer, if—but that “if” was every thing—if her heart was not already bestowed. Time only could explain if that were the case, and to time he must leave it; and, wavering between hope and fear, though fear predominated, he hastened to the library, to ponder on the words and manner of her he loved. The result of his meditation was to refrain from visiting Westwell; prudence advised the measure, and he would endeavour to obey its dictates. The father of William Penruddock had been dead about a year. The young Lord of Astol had now only his mother left, he would devote his time to her, and persuade her to travel; for while they remained at the Manor House it would be impossible to refuse the friendly kindness of Lady Mary, who had been ever the loved associate of Mrs. Penruddock, and now they were scarcely ever parted, except when his mother paid a visit.

which was the case at present, to an aged and infirm relation.

In pursuance of this determination William Penruddock remained two whole days in the library, closely shut up; he did not dare venture out of the house, lest his feet should unwittingly and without his knowledge stray over to Westwell; it would not be the first time, though the distance was fifteen miles. In the evening of the second day as he was looking over a book, for read he did not, the door opened, and Sir Edward Meredeth entered the library, saying, "Are you alive, Penruddock?"

"Alive! I hope and believe I am; without this prosy book has been the death of me; and I am very glad to relinquish it for your society."

"I must know first what excuse you have to give for two days' absence, when you have no one here to claim a right to take you from us; you put us all in a grand fright at home. I expected no less than to find you in bed with

a broken leg, or a broken head, or that kind."

"Fortunately for me——"

"No, not fortunately, you would have an excuse; as it is, you will have to do to satisfy all at the Park, and your bright eyes that have been dull all day, and wonder of some mischance has happened to thee, most well-beloved, while you have only had a fit of laziness. Thee, friend William, like thy honoured memory, save that thy appellation has two more syllables, and sends me to thy other home:—and, verily, I have tale to tell thee as we sojourn on our way."

"As we are not likely to do that this evening, you had better tell you what we commence our return."

"Had I? Well then, order some wine, I will. And now draw your ease to the table, while I take possession of the room. Come, this is snug. And now a bun-

me courage to declare all my folly :—in the first place, I am in love !”

Penruddock made no remark, but hastily filled a glass, and after drinking it he appeared to be all attention. He spoke not, and Sir Edward considerably turned rather from him, or he would have seen, notwithstanding the obscure light, how his colour changed, from red to pale and then red again, as his kind-hearted companion proceeded :—“ In the first place, I repeat, I am in love ;—in the second, I mean to propose ;—and, in the third, if the lady says yes, I shall be married as quickly as the lawyers and such people will permit. And now, William, you must be the first to wish me joy.”

“ Joy, yes ! most heartily ! I wish you all happiness, dear Edward ; and if ever two people deserved to be blest, you do,” said Penruddock with fervour, but with a faltering accent, which, at such a time, might affect one who had no immediate concern, save as a friend. Sir Edward’s was not quite firm, though he replied with a laugh—

"I take all credit for my own merit; but can you judge of a stranger, one not even of my land? This is, I fear, beyond even your discernment?"

A hasty movement of Penruddock's, nearly upset the table, interrupted Sir Edward. He well knew the cause, but affecting to suppose it accidental, he continued, "The lady I have to woo is an Italian by birth, and a very beautiful girl she is, as you——"

Again he was interrupted. "Edward, I know not the tumult your words have caused, but, tell me, is Florence aware of your love?"

"Oh, yes! I told her when I first returned."

"If I am not presumptuous," said Penruddock, "how blest my lot will be!"

"Presumptuous!—But I tell you what you have not acted like a true friend, or you have made me your confidant. Did you not know I was blind, that I could not see your love for my sweet cousin?"

"But when I believed she loved you, I thought that it was mutual?"

"With that impression, Penruddock, you acted as you ever have done, with honour and generosity; and now we will drink success to each other!"

"And," said Penruddock, rising and ringing the bell, "I will order the horses for our return."

"If I loved tantalization, I should propose remaining here till morning; you could not, as master of the house, refuse."

"I would provide for your entertainment; but I certainly would not remain myself."

Sir Edward was surprised and amused by the alteration in the manner of his companion, from the languid, thoughtful demeanour that had lately crept over him; he was now even more alert and impatient than Meredeth himself. They were soon on their return to Westwell.

"I have passed the Rubicon," was the mental ejaculation of Sir Edward, as he retired for the night. "To-morrow I will write to Naples. And now, my pretty Florence, I must think no

more of you, save as my cousin and the wife of William Penruddock !"

A few sighs escaped from the bosom of Sir Edward Meredith ; but he thought of the black eyes of Naples, and commenced his letter to the fair Carlina.

Sir Edward gave no thought to the wealth to which Florence was heiress ; he had plenty ; but Lady Mary and Sir George Stanley regretted the failure of their long-cherished hope and desire to unite the estates of the families. This regret was increased by the information they received, that the lady chosen by Sir Edward was an Italian, though much was reported of her beauty, amiability, and accomplishments, while the sister of Sir Edward spoke of her with enthusiasm.

As Florence was not to wed her cousin, there was no one to whom her father and grandmother would so willingly entrust her happiness as the Lord of Astol. William Penruddock was only less beloved than the pair they had intended to

unite. Preparations and arrangements were speedily commenced for the wedding, when immediately after Sir Edward intended to depart for the continent.

The sun shone brilliantly, and all were gay, when the bells rang out the marriage peal, on the day that gave Florence Stanley to William Penruddock; and it would have been scarcely possible to have collected a happier group than the one assembled in and about Westwell Park and Astol Manor. The tenants were feasted, oxen were roasted whole; while the fire-works that illuminated the forest were the wonder and admiration of the neighbourhood. The happy pair departed to spend their honeymoon at a distant seat of Sir George Stanley's, and the young Meredeth, after a few sighs of regret for the woman he had lost, and a few of anticipation for the one he hoped to gain, left England for Naples.

Sir Edward Meredeth was not fated to love a second time in vain; the friends of the Lady

sweetness, that if he had
goet for his cousin, it was
Sir Edward was persuaded
his feelings, that he re-
rence more than as a si-
utterly different in the
increased his ardour, to
the beautiful girl, whose
that was the charm,—he
loved with a fervour
tender kindness exhibi-
love and pride were both
Naples disputed the prize
Lady Carlina. She
handsomest female in
the adorers who had bo-

both, though each was lovely there was a wide difference,—Carlina commanded the devotion of those around,—Florence won it. No one could see the Lady Carlina without being struck with the splendour of her beauty;—with Florence, many when they first saw her only termed her a pretty pirl, a very pretty girl, as they looked more intently at her; but when they heard her speak and saw the charm of her smile, she was loveliness itself, and with her this opinion never varied, except to increase the admiration, such magic has sweetness and softness combined with intellect.

Sir Edward Meredith, proud of his bride, and happy beyond what he had ever expected, beyond even the dream of boyhood, hastened as soon as the wedding festivities were over, to exhibit his peerless beauty to those who were prepared to love and greet her at Westwell; and again the rejoicings were renewed; Lady Meredith was delighted with all she saw, and all were delighted with her. And now Westwell

Park and Astol Manor House continued scene of gaiety and mirth. lively to an extreme, and she around; even Lady Mary, aged she was, partook of the general though unable to witness all, or numerous balls, dinners, &c., yet she of them, and daily blessed the both her children so happy. Al closed her eyes on this world, all and lady Mary Stanley lived to city a complete wreck, which the firm and lasting.

CHAPTER III.

There is a very life in our despair,
 Vitality of poison,—a quick root
 Which feeds these deadly branches ; for it were
 As nothing did we die ; but life will suit
 Itself to Sorrow's most detested fruit,
 Like to the apples on the Dead Sea's shore,
 All ashes to the taste ; did man compute
 Existence by enjoyment, and count o'er
 Such hours 'gainst years of life,—say would he name
 threescore ?

THREE years of uninterrupted felicity ensued, and the happiness of both families was increased by the birth of a daughter to the House of Penraddock ; while an heir being born some months after to the Westwell estates did not diminish the gaiety of the young Lady Meredeth, which was unbounded, nay, it almost amounted to levity. Pure and innocent herself, she never dreamed that a wrong interpretation could be placed on her free and open pleasure : but so it was,—her immediate friends at first wondered

at such uncontrolled spirits, then v
and at last appeared to have take
her hilarity. The Park and the
were thronged with visitors, some
not like their hosts, happy th
pleased to see happiness in ot
loved her husband with all the
youthful heart, and next to him
Mr. Penruddock. Notwithstandi
she was able to appreciate the ch
Lord of Astol; and where judgm
decision were requisite, she was v
his opinion even before that of Sir
this she only followed the exa
dearest friends and relatives; it h
the custom at Westwell to apply, e
vice or information, to Mr. Penrud
liam will tell you," or "William
the answer given in such cases, an
ticularly by Sir Edward himself.

There are persons not happy
who take delight in lowering the

others; and when they meet a joyful heart, they will take pleasure in throwing a drop of cold water on their content. There were some of these unhappy beings at Westwell; and there were those who had a deeper motive, and which Sir Edward might have created by his jocund spirits, and innocent but fascinating gallantry; and while Lady Meredith was regarded with love and admiration by numbers, with others there was an affectation of surprise that Sir Edward should allow so much freedom of intercourse between his wife and Mr. Penruddock: insinuations were slyly given, whispers went round,—“How strange that Lady Meredith should always apply to Mr. Penruddock for advice!” Others would laughingly say—“Well, Sir Edward, I must give you credit for uncommon good temper, to let Lady Meredith flirt so with Mr. Penruddock.” These observations being frequently repeated at length had their effect, and “trifles, light as air” were making some impression on the mind of Sir Edward; the

seeds were sown, and the sensitive and generous Florence felt their influence; she once mentioned the subject to her husband, when he, proud of his integrity and honour, for the first time experienced something like displeasure, and wondered how his Florence should have so much of womanly frailty, when he had believed her perfect. Edward had also spoken to Carlina, hinting that such free intercourse might be allowed in Italy but not in England, where customs and manners were so widely different; the laughing derision and fond caress, with which she accompanied her replies, might have driven these vapours far away beyond the possibility of their return, if, unhappily, at this period the sister of Edward, with her husband, had not visited the home of her fathers. The Count Bertini was poor, proud, and not unwilling to employ any means to increase the income that was barely sufficient to supply the luxuries he considered absolutely essential. In the event of Sir Edward's dying without an heir, his sister was

possess the large estates of the Meredith family. To secure this property a deep and villanous scheme was planned, in which, however, the Countess Bertini had no share. It unhappily succeeded, and the Count effected his purpose of separating Sir Edward Meredith from the lady Carlina, and suggested doubts respecting the legitimacy of his son, the infant Evelyn. It is painful to trace all the plots and devices of villany, when the subtle web is thrown, in which a word would enable the victim to discover, and confound the reptile who is preparing to sting. That word not being spoken, all the plans of wickedness for a time succeed:—it was so in this case. The unsuspecting inhabitants of Westwell and Astol were the victims of the most diabolical malice, after first having been betrayed by the insinuations of folly. We will not weary our readers by recounting all the serpent-like windings of the deceiver; for some purpose the good were permitted to be crushed, and villany triumphed. Sir Edward

VOL. III.

was led on by the arts of the Count Bertini believe his wife guilty; his friend faithless. well were his schemes planned, that Sir Edw had no doubt, and Florence feared she did not doubt;—still she prayed, and believing reproaches would never recover lost affection she wept, but wept in silence, and mourned high pinnacle from which she was taught think her husband had fallen, more, far more than her own lost happiness.

This dejection Mr. Penruddock attributed to her situation, and though he was unremitting in his attentions, and loved her more tenderly than ever, yet by that strange perversity which makes all look “yellow to the jaundiced eye” so each attempt to soothe only served to increase the idea that it was pity and commiseration not love, that prompted his fond attentions. Time, however, and the absence of the wretched man who had scattered the poison, would have restored all to its original state of happiness; but unfortunately, the indignant vexation of Carlin

at the doubts and surmises of Sir Edward, who had not the virtue of forbearance in the same degree that Florence possessed it, increased the evil, and gave effect to the schemes of Bertini and a miniature likeness of the children, with which Lady Meredith intended to surprise her husband and Florence, was made the finishing stroke to a plot that destroyed the happiness of numbers, and produced a catastrophe even more direful than might have been desired by Bertini himself.

In a rage of passion at what Sir Edward considered "damning proof," he sent a challenge to his unsuspecting friend, whose first intimation that his honour or truth had ever been or was questioned, came in a formal demand to meet and give satisfaction for the injury Sir Edward's happiness had received, and this too at a time when Florence was on a sick bed. A premature confinement was followed by the death of the child, and, being a boy, the loss was more deeply regretted by Sir George Stanley and the family.

The challenge came in the demand to Mr. Penruddock to eleven the next morning. It was Mr. Penruddock could credit his senses, so totally unsuspecting having given cause for offence. He went immediately to Westwell, hoping that night, and to know the meaning of the jest—for jest it must be,—but Sir Edward was absent, and not expected the next day. This more confirmed him that it was being a joke or frolic, though not a pleasant one. At the time appointed he went armed with sword and pistols, but not as he was desired, "with sword and weapons." The place of meeting was far distant from the Manor House, and he was even before his time, with the surgeon, a carriage and a footman at some distance in attendance.

Mr. Penruddock walked slowly to the place, his thoughts were absorbed in the strangeness of Sir Edward's demand.

he scarcely expected to find him on the ground. Count Bertini came forward expressing his regret that such meeting was necessary to satisfy Sir Edward's injured honour. These words were not intelligible to the person addressed, and he begged an explanation. Bertini answered that in such cases as this there was none to be given, and begged to know what weapons Mr. Penruddock had brought, and where was his friend?

"There," he replied, pointing to Sir Edward, "he has ever been my first and dearest!"

"Villain!" said Sir Edward, in a voice stifled with rage, "add not hypocrisy to your other crimes, nor, like a coward, shrink from the contest!"

"Villain! This is some mistake; you cannot address these terms to me, Sir Edward Meredeth!"

"I repeat my words. Again I call you villain and coward—if you refuse me the satisfaction of a man!"

"But our long friendship! Yield me——"

"Sir, this is trifling! Produce or I will proclaim to the world both villain and coward!"

"Villain! Coward! I am Bertini; I have no weapon, but can supply me?"

"We have swords or pistols,—your choice, Sir."

"It is immaterial,—I leave it

"But we had better defer this friend, Mr. Penruddock."

"I shall seek no friend in an nor can I again ask the cause. weapons, Sir, and I am ready."

Count Bertini spoke aside with he then returned and gave a pair Mr. Penruddock, who, taking the cally, obeyed the instructions of They were to fire together. This pelled the momentary anger of

"This is dreadful!" he exclaimed. "Edward, let me understand the cause of this unfriendly conduct; you know I am no coward,—for your own sake reflect. I grieve to think how you will suffer when this is all explained."

"Poltroon and villain! your hypocrisy——"

"Will you give the word, Count Bertini?" interrupted Penruddock. The signal was given, Penruddock fired in the air; while at the same time the weapon of Sir Edward took effect, and Mr. Penruddock fell, severely (the surgeon at first thought mortally) wounded.

When Sir Edward saw the man he had loved from childhood fall senseless to the ground, a feeling of compunction came over him, but this sentiment was soon hurried away by Count Bertini, who insisted on his returning to the Hall, that he might be in readiness to leave, if Mr. Penruddock should not recover; promising at the same time to see the wounded man safely conveyed to his home, to which home we must now return, leaving its master in the care of the

surgeon, and one who had been the witness of this dreadful destruction of his health.

It has been said that the agony which was affected the frame of Florence, the doubts so cruelly instilled in her mind, the disastrous effect on her health, the confinement was the consequence of a birth whose birth had been earnestly expected, particularly by the father of Mrs. Penruddock, who survived but a few days. This was a cause of heartfelt sorrow to Mr. Penruddock, but he grieved more for his wife's health than his own, never conceiving that her affliction arose from the supposition of her own character. She felt as a mother at the loss of her infant; but these feelings were trifling compared to the agony she felt at the idea of her husband's faithless conduct and moral degradation. The man she dearly loved, whom she believed to be the very soul of honour, to see him in the exalted station where she loved

plate and almost worship him, was too dreadfully agonizing to be borne with reason, and the sensitive mind and feelings of Florence were too much for her weak frame. At intervals her reason wavered, but it was a calm melancholy that spread over her bewildered faculties, not the wild energy of insanity; and her medical attendants noticing that she was even more dejected after each interview with her husband, advised his abstaining from visiting her apartment, under the idea that she exerted herself so much at those periods, that it retarded the recovery of her health and strength. With this impression they unfortunately recommended him to be absent as much as possible, and even to remove from the Manor House. To this proposition Mr. Penruddock would not agree; but he oftener walked or rode over to Westwell, which was the most natural course for him to pursue, and the one that his wife would have desired, but for the fatal idea that had now taken full possession of her mind, and which she guarded

with the most jealous care. She had breathed the agony that opposed to her husband, all had been won. The lips of him she loved must smile, and happiness would once more be Astol's: but it was not to be. Yet her bias towards doubting the love, her husband, she was beginning to strengthen, to recover some confidence, and, at times, she almost had been deceived, and that she thought the man she would have died for. This gleam of felicity beaming on her mind seemed regaining its tone, rejoicing in the improved health and friend. No one had ever so deep wound her feelings had she been going on well, till the dream of Sir Edward met his former friend's intention.

Mrs. Penruddock had just finished her toilet requisite for an invalid, and

on a couch waiting the entrance of Mr. Penruddock, who usually spent this part of the morning with her; and as she was now able to bear the exertion of talking and listening, he was gradually extending the time, pleasing himself with the idea that a few more days would entirely restore her, and they might make a short tour by the coast. This intended journey gave pleasure also to Florence, and she was arranging the plan of their route, when the door was opened, and Lady Meredith entered the room in a hurried manner, saying, hastily, "Florence, where is your husband? Where is William?"

The quick entrance and agitated manner of Carlina were quite sufficient to occasion a corresponding tremor in the frame of the invalid, and a dread of everything terrible came over her, as she answered that she was expecting him, and that he was later than usual.

"Oh God!" then exclaimed Lady Meredith, "it is true." The trembling and faintness that came over Mrs. Penruddock prevented her from

asking what was true, and what dreadful event Carlina feared; but Carlina needed not to be questioned. In a frenzied manner, and with wild questions, she continued wringing her hands—"It is true—it is true! and he is dead! —he is dead!"

"Who is dead?—speak, Carlina!" was rather implied by the manner than the words of Florence; but Lady Meredith understood the inquiring look of agony, and answered quickly: "Edward is dead—my own dearest Edward, whom I have murdered by my folly! Yes, Florence," she continued, clasping her hands as she paced the room with frenzied haste,—“yes, he is killed by his dearest friend. They met—they fought—and Edward is killed!” As she spoke she rushed out of the apartment, leaving her wretched friend stretched, apparently lifeless on the couch; but she was not even senseless: the agony she endured was too keen to be subdued even by a temporary oblivion. For a short space she remained silent and motionless; the

she started from the sofa, and with more strength than she had exhibited even in her usual state of health, she opened a writing-desk, wrote a page, folded and directed it to her husband. She then again threw herself on the couch ; when hearing a noise in the house, as if some bustle or unusual event was taking place, she again rose, appeared to hesitate, then, sunk on her knees for a few moments, she seemed absorbed in prayer. The bustle came nearer ; she started, rushed to a small cabinet which she opened, and taking out a phial, she poured some drops with a hasty hand, but without any tremor or hesitation ; then returning to the sofa, she resumed her place on it, and taking the letter she had written in one hand, with the other she raised the glass to her mouth and drank the contents, then gently sunk back on the couch ; and when the attendants entered the room she appeared to be asleep. It was not long before they perceived her situation, when their fears and horror overcame all prudence, all dread for their master,

who was just brought in and carried to his own apartment, where the surgeon was taking his directions how to proceed to conceal his wounded state from the ladies. When hearing the exclamations of "my lady!" he first sent the surgeon to remain still while such fearful screams were resounding through the hall, and then proceeded as fast as his fainting condition permitted to Mrs. Penruddock's door, where, extended on the sofa, lay the wife—his beautiful Florence! a lifeless form.

Months passed away, and Mr. Penruddock still hovered between life and death. Length prevailed; a good constitution over the pangs of a wounded body; death would indeed have been a boon for which Mr. Penruddock prayed; but this boon, this refuge from suffering, this relief from wretchedness and pain, those who walk humbly and bear their cross denied. The lord of Astol lived, or rather

life: even the smiles and caresses of his little Laura failed to give that comfort which the heart of a parent is so open to receive. "I murdered her mother!" was his appalling reflection when the child was brought to him; and though he never refused to see her, yet at first her presence added fresh poignancy to his self-condemnation. Never for one moment did he question the certainty of his guilt. His wife was dead—not removed to a better world by the will of the Almighty—but hastened there by his unthinking conduct. To clear himself would implicate her. She was an angel, and he was her destroyer. No suspicion of the subtle arts that had been employed to pervert the judgment of his wife could by any chance occur to him. Had he been aware of the insidious trifles that were daily, hourly instilled into the mind of his Florence, his self-detestation might have been less severe. The paper in Mrs. Penruddock's hand, on which the ink was scarcely dry when the distracted husband re-

moved it to enable the attendants to proceed with their vain attempts to restore animation, contained words which were graven on his heart; the impression could never be obliterated. She believed him the worthless creature described by her last words; and she died with a full conviction of his guilt—with a full persuasion that he was, as she expressed it in her dying moments—"the betrayer of innocence: false to his friend, and faithless to his wife, he had destroyed the happiness of those with whom he had been the object of the most devoted love—the truest friendship. They had ever considered him their superior in virtue, talent, and all that was great and noble; and could she who had almost worshipped him live to see him fallen, degraded, deprived of the high character in which she loved to contemplate him—the murderer and betrayer of his friend? Oh no! it was impossible!"

The paper ended abruptly, as overcome with grief and horror, poor Florence, in a state of distraction which her weak frame and long ill-

ness gave her no strength to combat, prepared the fatal draught that consigned all parties to wretchedness and misery. To a proud, sensitive, and retiring disposition, the effect of such reproaches may be conceived. If she who loved him better than her life could form such opinion of his conduct, what might not the world imagine?—the opinion of the world had value in the eyes of Mr. Penruddock. He had always walked uprightly, and had received the respect and friendship of his associates; now he was to meet the reverse; his name would be linked with crimes of the deepest dye. But this reflection, though it had its due weight, was trifling compared to the fact that his wife, and his brother in affection, believed him a monster of baseness and ingratitude; and he must have acted basely, or she who was candour itself would never have condemned one she dearly loved to such utter misery and desolation. Such were the reflections of one who was as perfect as man can be, and whose every thought was to promote the happiness of others.

Lady Meredith left the dressing of her unfortunate friend under the impression that it was Sir Edward who had fallen. Her anxiety on her return to Westwell was not lessening on her mind bordering on frenzy; she succeeded far, when she met the servants and attendants who were conveying Mr. Penruddock to the Manor House. The idea of his death originated in the flying reports of the domestics. Though relieved from her fears, she had felt when she supposed Sir Edward to be the sufferer, her affliction was only lessened when she saw him whom she respected as her brother, to all appearance in his senses. She returned with the sufferer to the Manor House to witness the frightful scene of Penruddock's death, and the distress of her husband, and, like him, to reproach herself for being the cause. More fortunately for her, Penruddock, whose reason never wavered, found Meredith found refuge in insanity. For months she was in a state of perfect insensibility while the recollection of Mr. Penruddock's death

keenly alive to all that had passed. He would not permit the requisite care to be taken of his wounds till he had seen the form he so dearly loved reposing in the silent tomb; then he submitted to his attendants, and was perfectly passive to all that occurred. Many were the events that happened while he remained in a state neither of life nor death, and which his medical attendants ordered to be concealed from him till he was more able to bear the shock of new misfortunes. But Mr. Penruddock had been so deeply agonized, that when, on his return to convalescence, he was gradually prepared for the announcement of the deaths of Lady Mary Stanley and Sir George, it scarcely caused an additional pang. At Lady Mary's extreme age this event was to be expected; but Sir George Stanley was in the prime of life; and Mr. Penruddock, while he considered him another victim, only regretted that he also had not been removed from what to him was literally a world of sorrow and misery.

The report of Carlina's state more effect, and Mr. Penruddock from his state of torpor to listen to her, and, if possible, devise some

When Sir Edward was hurried of action by Count Bertini, he returned well to prepare for a longer journey, deemed very uncertain if Mr. Penruddock survive. There the news arrived of the woman he had first loved—the one who resigned for him—who, he believed, robbed him of the affections of another he doted. Sir Edward's agony, of a different kind, was equal to Mr. Penruddock's, but with this solace: he had no one to bear, either from himself or others, a heart filled with scorn, indignation, for all those whom he believed so. He listened to the arguments used by Bertini for his departure, which, in some cases, was necessary; as, if Mr. Penruddock died, the agitation that must ensue would bear

Edward, who had pressed the contest while his antagonist was decidedly averse, and had neither arms nor friend with him: to this the surgeon and attendants could testify.

Before Sir Edward left Westwell, he wrote to Carlina, with bitter and contemptuous animadversions on her conduct and faithlessness; he informed her that the doors of Westwell would never again be open to receive her, nor any other mansion of which he was master; but, at the same time, his steward had orders to supply her with money, or whatever else she might require, and it ended with bidding her an eternal farewell, and a scornful recommendation to repent, if possible.

Poor Lady Meredeth received this note when a lucid interval enabled her to feel the full horror of her situation: happily for her, her senses again sunk under the weight of her misery.

The mother of Mr. Penruddock was still living, but an infirm state of health had required a constant residence near town, to be under the

care of able medical attendants. Though scarcely equal to the exertion, she hastened to Astol on the news of her daughter-in-law's sudden death; and she had now the painful task of attending and soothing so many whom she loved and pitied. Her unprejudiced eye and clear intellect soon comprehended, by the incoherent ravings of Carlina, that no guilt burdened her mind; and, on a closer investigation, it was evident that if there was any blame to be attached to either, it was barely imprudence. That imprudence only should produce such dreadful effect was as strange as it was true; but Mrs. Penruddock hoped that a short time would restore Carlina and her husband to composure and to each other. So, perhaps, they might, had she been spared to use her influence on the mind of Sir Edward; but he left the country, and, to avoid all chance of communication from Carlina, he kept his route a secret. No one knew, or acknowledged they knew, his address.

Lady Meredeth was a Catholic, and, for a

young and thoughtless woman, rather rigid in her observance of the duties enjoined by the Roman faith. Various were the penances which she inflicted on herself; but one partook of the nature of a consolation,—this was to hear a certain number of prayers repeated for the repose of the lamented Florence, and pardon for herself. This ceremony was regularly and daily performed, at the exact hour when Mrs. Penruddock took the deadly draught. Carlina's confessor, who had accompanied her from Italy, performed this stated duty; and when Mr. Penruddock recovered sufficiently to be able to move from his room, he, with his mother, at the urgent request of Carlina, attended: he afterwards found this ceremony as soothing to his own feelings as it was to Carlina's, and a small building, adjoining the house of the steward, Groves, was appropriated to this purpose.

This building was at the extremity of the beech grove; and to prevent the possibility of interruption, Mr. Penruddock had forbidden

Penruddock gave the order to prevent his daughter from being acquainted with her mother. He considered himself the cause of the troubles that had occurred, he wished to have a more favourable opinion of himself for his own sake, if possible, he wished to keep her from her knowledge.

Though the prayers at these occasions were pronounced by persons of different creed, yet the people were so full of forgiveness that they might accord. Penruddock was no bigot, and his applications would be accepted by whom all classes, all religions were united under different names and in different forms.

There was one proposal

vow never to see Mr. Penruddock again, and he was equally ready to strengthen her resolution. It was painful for him either to allow her residence on his domain, or to desire her removal; but when sufficiently well to be informed by his mother of her application to Sir Edward, and that she had received no answer, and when she also related the fact of Sir Edward having forbidden Carlina's return to him, he could hesitate no longer; she must be protected—humanity forbade her being cast on the world a stranger and friendless,—and he approved the arrangements formed by Mrs. Penruddock. Apartments were prepared for Lady Meredith at the dwelling of Mr. Groves, and her confessor resided at the Grange; where after some years, when Carlina was partly restored to rationality, she was allowed to wander whenever she might feel inclined. The steward's house was situated at the extremity of the Beech grove, and near the Grange; by passing through the Beech grove, the distance was not more than half a

mile to the Manor House; while by taking the road round the park, there were full two miles between the dwellings.

Lady Meredith also found a mournful assurance in visiting the tomb of Florence; a mother of Mr. Penruddock had a small parlour repaired that had formerly been used by the family, who, being of a serious and gloomy turn, passed much time in the chapel. The passage opened with a sliding panel into the interior of the pews, and stated times were allowed for her to pass in and out of the parlour, so that she might never interfere with the lord of the mansion, when on the same melancholy duty.

In this secluded and melancholy mode of life, Mr. Penruddock proposed to conceal his daughter from the world and from sorrow. Remaining unknown and unloved, save by her father, around her, he hoped she would escape the evils which had so fatally destroyed the happiness of her mother. With superior beauty and equal sweetness, and the advantage of the

est accomplishments, joined to a knowledge of the world, Florence had lived unhappily, and died miserably. Carlina's fate had been similar, except in the last sad event. She was still living, if her state could be called living. If these two amiable and apparently fortunate women had been so fatally wretched, what could he expect for one so young, and, in consequence of these calamities, so unknown to the world? "No, he would strive to guard Laura from love, its certain cares, and uncertain happiness."

In pursuance of this resolution, he endeavoured to destroy all communication with the world. We need not repeat to our readers how his plans were defeated by the introduction of Walter Rayland to the Manor House.

The death of Mrs. Penruddock, or, as she was termed by the family, Madame Everard, about two years after the sad events we have been relating, scarcely added to the grief of her son. His dejection could not be increased; and though he truly loved his mother, and though

her death threw him more deeply into trouble, yet it was borne with a firmness that cannot be felt when the mind is resigned, or so distressed, that it despairs of comfort and consolation.

Sir Edward Meredith was recalled from his rambling excursion, or rather his attempt to get from himself, by the loss of Sir George Sturges and Lady Mary; Mrs. Aubrey, and the young Evelyn, were then residing at Westwell. Sir Edward would never allow the child to be brought into his presence, nor would he hear a word in relative to his wife. Mrs. Aubrey, a mild, gentle, and timid woman, made several efforts to convince Sir Edward that, under every circumstances were against Carlina, she was innocent; but Sir Edward with furious indignation was deaf to all argument. The facts against Lady Meredith, and the fatal death of the lamented Florence was more than sufficient to prove the guilt of both parties:—still Mrs. Aubrey persisted, when Sir Edward, with some

imprecations, declared his resolution, if further importuned, to procure a divorce, and contest the legitimacy of his infant child, the little Evelyn. Mrs. Aubrey did not reason on the possibility of his proofs being admitted by a court of justice ; the bare idea of the intent was more than sufficient to render her absolutely submissive. She loved the whole family as if it had been her own ; but Sir Edward was ever her favourite, and Carlina, from being the idol of his affections, became the darling of hers. The gaiety of Carlina's disposition accorded with the temper of Mrs. Aubrey, whose increasing infirmities prevented her from seeking the amusement in which she delighted ; and perhaps, when these trials visited the house of Meredeth, Mrs. Aubrey loved Carlina even more than she did Sir Edward.

At this time the situation of Lady Meredeth appeared to be that of a confirmed lunatic : this calamity had some weight with Mrs. Aubrey, and enabled her, with less reluctance, to comply

with the imperious commands of Sir Edward never to mention his wife, if she wished to retain the name. Mrs. Aubrey was pelled to submit, and retiring to the cottage at Woodend with her charge, the heir of Westwell, she was liberally supplied by Sir Edward, and every arrangement was made for her comfort, with permission to remove to any residence, and to expend what sums she deemed requisite for the education of Evelyn; but there was one condition which grieved her sadly, and which was never to make him acquainted with her birth, or the name to which she might consider him entitled.

Sir Edward, under some pretence, contrived to remove all the servants from Westwell; leaving the splendid mansion of Westwell in the care of new domestics, he proceeded to the continent, passing his time alternately there and in London, and in a vortex of dissipation sure sought to forget the loves and miseries of his early years.

This state continued till the death of Mrs. Aubrey, whose dying summons he could not refuse to attend; at that awful hour his kindly feelings for a short time had the ascendancy, and he was almost convinced, from her representation, that Carlina was innocent, and Evelyn his lawful heir; and he promised his dying friend that he would protect her charge, and perhaps, at some future time, acknowledge him the heir of his name and estate. This impression was daily gaining ground, notwithstanding the insidious endeavours of the Count Bertini; but Sir Edward had so long cherished his resentment, that it appeared a part of his nature. If all were innocent, still his happiness had been wrecked—a total wreck—he could never love, he never wished to love Carlina again. Sorrow and indignation had altered his character; and the open, candid, and generous traits, which were so conspicuous in his early years, seemed to have disappeared, leaving a vindictive and suspicious temper to supply their loss. This,

length of all classes, Sir Ed-
continued his career.

After the death of Mrs. .
letter, informed Count Bert
of Evelyn's legitimacy, and h
future time, of acknowledg
claration led to the ill-judg
attempt to secure the baron
to settle the succession on t
which ill-contrived and ill-d
led to the introduction of W
Edward Meredeth.

CHAPTER IV.

He that endures for what his conscience knows
 Not to be ill, doth from a patience high
 Look only on the cause whereto he owes
 Those sufferings, not on his misery :
 The more he endures, the more his glory grows,
 Which never grows from imbecility :
 Only the best composed and worthiest hearts
 God sets to act the hard'st and constant'st parts.

THE events that we have detailed were more briefly related by Sir Edward Meredeth to his attentive and interested auditor; when rising, he rang for lights, and then inquired what his companion thought of his painful recital?

"It is a dreadful tale indeed," replied Walter, "and well accounts for the melancholy seclusion of Mr. Penruddock. What a horrible fate for one whom all represent as being amiable and so lovely!"

"She was truly so; and her husband may

well mourn the wickedness and folly that drove her to this extremity."

"After having seen Mr. Penruddock, as I have intimately for some weeks," said Rayland, "it would require strong evidence to convince me that he is either an immoral or an ungrateful character, or that he had ever been such."

"The fearful fate of so amiable a woman as my cousin Florence is, methinks, strong and deep evidence," said Sir Edward with bitterness and shuddering. Sir Edward was slow to admit conviction; he had suffered so severely, and the consequence had been so disastrous, that it was a sort of painful satisfaction to condemn those by whom this misery had been caused. The most intimate friend of Sir Edward would not have supposed him to have a secret grief, nor, in the scenes of gaiety to which he so eagerly rushed, was he himself aware of the extent of his sorrow; but in the silence of the night, or when some untoward event recalled the memory of the past, then it soothed the violence of his anguish to

breathe curses " deep and direful " on the supposed author of his wretchedness. It was vain to think of his love being renewed, his happiness restored ; —fourteen years of separation had destroyed the feelings of his early days ;—and though Sir Edward would have shuddered at the idea of wishing those he had so dearly loved to be the guilty beings he had once supposed them, yet the growing and wavering conviction of their innocence did not give him pleasure. His happiness was gone for ever, and he should not have the poor consolation of having some one to blame. It was the struggle of a really generous but passionate disposition with long-cherished anger and vindictiveness.

Walter combated the opinion of Sir Edward, alleging that the fatal catastrophe of Mrs. Penruddock was not absolutely convincing. It might be accident, or her previous illness might dispose her to view the passing events with a distorted and distempered eye. Sir Edward shook his head. " Facts are hard to combat,

Mr. Rayland, and this is incontrovertible:" I paused, then continued, while Walter was shocked to see the frightful expression he had before observed, again pass over his features,—"the person who bears my name, and is considered in the eye of the law as my wife, still lives under the protection of Mr. Penruddock!"

"I think I may venture to deny that," replied Walter. "I was some weeks a resident at As and certainly there was no female there who could by any possibility be Lady Meredith; they were all too old or too young, and, excepting Miss Penruddock and her friend, they were all domestics."

"Ah! you know not the secret contrivances of that hated mansion. Often, when a boy, half I and its present master amused ourselves with endeavouring to find out all its privacies and concealments. We succeeded in tracing many, but they were too well planned for a casual observer to detect." After a short silence, S Edward continued,— "Laura Penruddock

living, then? She is my god-daughter; may her fate be happier than her mother's! Did you hear, Mr. Rayland, if she bore any resemblance to that ill-fated being?"

"She is a sweet, interesting girl, and I should call her beautiful; taste varies, but all must term her very pretty; though Mrs. Weston speaks of her as being far inferior to her mother in respect to loveliness."

"Weston is living too! She must be an aged woman; she has seen strange scenes, and, no doubt, she could have informed you that you were not introduced to all the inhabitants of the Manor House. But we will drop this subject, Mr. Rayland; it is most painful to me, and would never have been the topic of conversation between us, had I not hoped to claim you as my guest at Westwell; when, being so near Astol, you would naturally inquire, "why such near neighbours were not intimate?" These queries might revive the memory of the past, and recall events which, after their allotted time of wonder,

died away. The sudden death of poor Florence was not very surprising, as she had been unwell for some time. My marriage with a foreigner and a Catholic was sufficient to account for our separation; and it was supposed Carlina had returned to her native land. So you see, Mr. Rayland, the necessity there was for enlightening you;—and now shall we join some gay party for the last time in Venice?" Walter declined the invitation: he could not shake off the painful impression left by the sad tale he had just heard; nor could he conceive the nature of his companion, who, the next morning, appeared all gaiety, and as unlike the person he had seen so strangely agitated as could possibly be.

"Had it not been for your perverse whim," said Sir Edward, before they separated to pursue their respective routes, "of choosing the long dreary road by Paris homeward, had you decided on following the shores of the Garonne, and visiting the beautiful and poetic land of 'gay Provence,' we might have journeyed in

company, and had many a merry freak while personating troubadours, for which profession I have a vocation ; and there are bright eyes and sweet smiles in Languedoc, to reward our toil. It is not too late, friend Walter ; so where all is mutable ; be you so too."

" I should need little persuasion to try my skill with yours, if there were not many kind and dear friends beckoning me another way, my father and mother among the rest, who will require me to speak for them and think for them, and they opine that they are unequal to the task, seeing that they have not left their own dear little foggy island since the French revolution, before which event took place, they fell desperately in love with each other at the court of ' la belle France ;' but we may suppose how unlike what they will find it at the present day. It is therefore imperative that they should have some safe guide to direct and aid their course. So, my friend, farewell till we meet some few weeks hence."

Sir Edward proceeded by Bourdeaux to London, when, remaining a few days, he left for Westwell, merely intending to settle some affair with his steward before he gave Walter the meeting at Merry Wood Dale. He felt little pleasure in visiting the noble mansion that had been the scene of his happiest hours, and had also been witness to the reverse. With the cheerful unbroken spirits of Walter he hoped to disperse some of the gloom that would assail him in that abode, where the demon ennui appeared to have made its home. Sir Edward could not command those gay spirits so completely as to claim their support at all times and all places. At Westwell Park they fled from him; and once, when he made the attempt by inviting some choice, some boon companions to stay and share the hospitality of his dwelling, he was obliged to plead illness as the cause for his depression, and then found out that the air of the forest disagreed with his constitution.

On the arrival of Sir Edward at Westwell, he

received a letter that had been waiting some weeks, with written directions, to be given him when he reached the Park. This letter threw him into a paroxysm of rage which required many days to abate; indeed, it was some time before he could credit his senses, or conceive the possibility of a request from Mr. Penruddock to be allowed an interview respecting an affair of importance.

“He meet Mr. Penruddock!” the man he had once loved most sincerely, and now as sincerely detested. “He grant an interview!” He had hoped never to hear the name again, and it was no small effort to repeat it as he did to Walter Rayland; and now he was to see him,—to speak to him,—to be in the same room with him. It was well he had not appointed the Manor House, in that case a direct refusal would have been his reply; and even now it was long ere he could prevail on himself to send a verbal message appointing a day when he would be ready to receive Mr. Pen-

ruddock: till that time arrived he was in a chaos of agitation, now determined to hasten to Merry Wood Dale,—then as determined to stay and upbraid him with the ruin he had brought on both their houses.

The interview was equally dreaded by Penruddock, though with different feelings. He was resigned to existing circumstances, and was perfectly willing to admit and bear even reproaches than Sir Edward might utter. He never thought to leave the boundaries of Park again, and no motive less than the pressing entreaties contained in a letter from Lady Meredith, in which she implored him to do so for the cause of her son, could have prevailed. He feared, unless Mr. Penruddock took an active part, that the hopes and wishes of Evelyn would be disappointed. Sir Edward had shown too plainly that the happiness of Evelyn was not considered by him: he was not loved, he was only tolerated. But the heart-broken wife and mother hoped the earnest desire of herself

Mr. Penruddock for this alliance would remove any lingering doubts that might yet remain in the mind of Sir Edward, whose frightful surmises had not been concealed from the unfortunate Carlina, and the indignant reproaches which he wrote her had helped to rivet the calamity. No, in her case it was not a calamity,—oblivion was a blessing, even if accompanied with insanity.

At the appointed time Mr. Penruddock left the Manor House, and, after a lapse of fourteen years, once more proceeded on the formerly well-known road to Westwell. There was no road now, but Reuben Barwell was well qualified to act as guide through the intricacies of the forest. The trees and copse wood had been so carefully protected, and left in their natural state, that there was not even a bridle-path, where formerly carriages were continually passing over a well-beaten road or on the smooth turf; but as this road only led to the respective mansions of Sir Edward and Mr. Penruddock,

it was the natural consequence, when friendship ceased, that the briars and brambles should spring up, like the dissension between the families, and destroy the work of years without the assistance of the several owners of the estates to make the way impassable. The Lord of the Manor and his companion were consequently obliged to proceed slowly, and in some parts to walk; to Reuben this was a morning's excursion, but to Mr. Penruddock it was a long and fearful way, and many were the rests they were obliged to make. How dreary and tedious a road may be, and how weary we may desire to rest our limbs and reach the end, yet there are seasons when each succeeding step only adds another weight to our shoulders, and every interruption is a relief: this was the case with Mr. Penruddock—this interview was the most dreaded, and it required the utmost resolution to persevere.

At length they arrived at Westwell; Reuben waited at a farm adjoining, while his companion

proceeded to the Hall. It was with difficulty that Mr. Penruddock could follow the steps of the domestic, from the agitation that was excited by each well-known object : the vestibule, with its marble pillars and statues—the splendid conservatory that led to the drawing rooms—the wide magnificent staircase with the long open corridors, embellished with vases and paintings—were all too dear, and spoke of past events with an intensity scarcely to be supported by the weak frame and anguished mind of Mr. Penruddock. The whole scene was to him like the face of a well-remembered but estranged friend ; long-forgotten thoughts rushed on his memory, and it was with trembling limbs and obscured vision that he took the chair which the servant placed for him : the large soft reclining piece of furniture received the almost fainting form of Mr. Penruddock, and the man, not perceiving the situation of the visitor, left him, to inform his master that a guest had arrived. A mist passed over the senses of Mr. Penruddock,

and when he recovered, it was only to experience deeper pain,—this was the very apartment in which he first hoped that Florence had stronger feelings for him than brotherly love. It was the favourite room of the family : there was the large open window leading on the terrace, the flowers were apparently the same that he had so often seen Florence attending and arranging; they were still twining round the trellis work and creeping inside the room; they were flourishing and blooming, while the hand which had so often gathered the blossom for him, and so often pointed out the beauty of her favourites,—was now the hand of a ghastly skeleton. There was the recess at one extremity of the room, with its painted window facing the south, where his mother, with Lady Mary and Mrs. Aubrey, would pursue their amusements and avocations; at the corresponding end there was the chess table so often employed by his father and Sir George Stanley; and there were the musical instruments,—there a splendid work and writing

able which belonged to Florence, and which he said became the terrace-room so well, she could not have it removed, but left it, as she told Carlina, as an heir loom,—it well deserved to be one, being composed of ebony and silver. This table was placed in the centre of the apartment, opposite the open window ; and it was the custom with them, when the elders were employed, to have their laughing gossip round this table. Mr. Penruddock felt an additional thrill of anguish when he remembered that he was in the very same place, and the same chair, that he usually occupied on these occasions ; the carved ornaments of the massive pieces of furniture were sadly familiar, former scenes pressed on his recollection, he almost saw the figure of Florence as, in her girlish days, she would catch the ball thrown from the lawn by himself or Sir Edward, over the stone balustrade ; and the only time they had ever received a frown from Lady Mary was when they had climbed over the railing from the lawn to the terrace, and had per-

suaded Florence, with their help
same feat. Many and various
cences that now pressed on him
terness,—they were the ghosts
—visions of happiness faded
world. He could bear it no long
he went to the terrace, and
balustrades, hoping to lose the
that now oppressed him almost
one time he thought—would it
or death would be gladly wel
this feeling of misery might be
no! he recalled his prayer for
getfulness: there was one tie
child—his innocent Laura; he
the existence that was necessary
comfort; he had no dream of ha
even for her; but his aid was w
her in the world, as he could no
secure her peace in solitude. I
petition for pardon for the self
again the past returned,—the

Ah ! it was the same so well painted on his memory ! The same lawn—forest—village—sea—and the distant Isle of Wight ; not the lovely night-view which had once been witness to his awakening prospect of happiness,—he was thankful it was not the same, he could not have borne that. The bright sun now shone in splendour on the land below, casting a shade on some parts, and brilliancy on others ; it was all too familiar, and Mr. Penruddock returned to the chair he had left to await the arrival of Sir Edward ; but he was now even less prepared than on his first entrance, he heeded not the time, nor was he aware that he had been nearly an hour in the terrace-room before the servant returned with a message, intimating that Sir Edward was in the library, and “ ready to receive Mr. Penruddock.”

The man opened the door and stood ready to escort his master's visiter ; finding he did not immediately rise, he went to repeat his message, when he was struck by his paleness ; that, in-

deed, was natural to Mr. Penruddock, but the expression denoted pain and faintness.

"Are you not well, Sir?" asked the servant.

"I will thank you for a glass of water," was all Mr. Penruddock could answer.

The man brought it, with some drops. After a few moments' delay the agitated Lord of Astol rose to follow the domestic. He was almost unequal to the effort, and was obliged to take the arm of the servant, as they passed through the various splendid galleries and costly apartments on their way to the library.

Sir Edward was seated as they entered, when he hastily rose from the chair, and paced the room in great agitation. The servant assisted Mr. Penruddock to a sofa by the table, and then left the apartment. A long silence ensued, both were unable to speak, and the interview being granted at the desire of Mr. Penruddock, Sir Edward did not attempt to break the awful pause, which, however, was more oppressive to his impetuous temper, than to the subdued mind

of the visiter : Sir Edward, however, was the first to commence the conversation, and it appeared to be involuntarily.

“ We are once more, Mr. Penruddock, under the same roof,” said he, and in a lower voice he added, “ It does not fall, and end at once our crimes and miseries.” This was not intended for the ear of Mr. Penruddock, but, low as it was spoken, he caught the words, and replied—

“ When this interview is over, I care not how soon the life which I have borne so long in sorrow and despair is ended—save on one subject—this world has no care, no concern, that requires my interference ; and it will be a blissful event that releases this worn-out frame. You, Sir Edward, I rejoice to see, have not been pressed on so heavily.”

Sir Edward paced the room with hasty and agitated steps, at length he stopped, saying—
“ Mr Penruddock, it is vain for us to think of the forms of society ; that we should meet again in this world appears to me most strange and

unnatural. You requested the interview, have the kindness to explain your motive, that this hour may not be prolonged."

"If misfortune be a sufficient cause for enmity, we have reason indeed for our estrangement. I know no other subject of dissension, and it would remove some portion of that grief which weighs on me so heavily, if we were once more friends."

"Friends!—Friends! Do I not owe all my wretchedness,—all my days of blighted happiness,—the loves of my early years twice crossed by your baleful presence; and now you talk of being friends!"

"Twice! I do not understand you, Sir Edward."

"Did I not conquer the love I bore to Florence?"

Mr. Penruddock turned still paler at the name, while it was only by a strong effort he could retain any composure.

"Did I not relinquish my sweet martyred

cousin, though, heaven knows, how fondly, how fervently I loved her? Did not my romantic folly prefer the happiness of him I called my friend, to my own? and by such act I destroyed both dear injured Florence and myself. While a third," he added, and his voice was hoarse with emotion, while his countenance bore evidence to his frightful agitation, "was also your victim!"

"Just heaven!" said Mr. Penruddock, rising with an energy which in his state of extreme weakness seemed supernatural. "Just heaven! you cannot,—you dare not! insinuate that your frenzied jealousy was founded in reason! You dare not say that Carlina was false, or that I betrayed her?"

Sir Edward replied, scornfully, "Your question needs no answer. We had never met under one roof had such been now my impression. But how does that avail me? Is not my happiness still wrecked? Is not Carlina as strictly divorced as if the law had pronounced the sen-

tence? And is not that angel Florence in the tomb of your ancestors, or rather, is she not in heaven? And was not all this misery caused by the folly of Carlina, and your own senseless conduct? Ever prone to believe, what we were so ready to inculcate, that you were superior to all; it was your own pride, William Penruddock, that has caused all this misery,—your own pride and self-esteem."

Mr. Penruddock made no reply, his momentary energy was over, and he was ever ready to admit that his errors were the cause of the calamity that had destroyed the happiness of so many who were most dear to him; it was only when the fame of another was questioned, that he felt equal to the denial of more than imprudence; he was too ready to blame himself for not attending to the gentle remonstrances of his wife.

"And now," continued Sir Edward, "may I ask the motive for this intrusion?"

"It is at the desire of one whose wish ought

to be more than sufficient. It is at the request of Lady Meredith."

"Lady Meredith! She might have chosen another messenger. Has she no feeling for the catastrophe such intercourse has produced?"

"She has been too keenly alive to the woe that has been inflicted, for some wise purpose, no doubt," replied Mr. Penruddock, looking devoutly upwards, "her senses have sunk repeatedly under the misery that has befallen all she loved."

"What is her present request, Sir?"

"It is for her son and yours, Sir Edward. You are aware that for the last two years he has been a resident at Astol. My daughter and Evelyn are not unequal in age, nor is it unnatural that they should have formed an attachment."

"You come, then," said Sir Edward, compressing his lips and speaking still more harshly, "to propose a treaty of marriage,—a union between the houses of Westwell and Astol? Am

I right, Sir? You wish a connection between wretchedness and——” —He paused from inability to proceed.

Mr. Penruddock bowed, but made no reply.

Sir Edward again paced the library, then suddenly addressing his companion, “Your daughter, is she also a party to this request?”

“Undoubtedly it is her wish; at least she has given her consent.”

“Then, Mr. Penruddock, if all the principal personages are agreed, methinks this interview, which can be pleasing to neither, might have been spared.”

“It was not my own desire; the wish of Lady——”

“Great God! William Penruddock! Why will you repeat the name so abhorrent to my ears, even yours——” —He stopped, and again paced the room.

“So less hateful, you would say,” said Mr. Penruddock, mournfully. “I have, indeed, much to lament, more than I imagined. But

why, Sir Edward, you should express such indignant emotion at the mention of one——”

“Who is living under your protection, whom the roof of Astol shelters!” exclaimed Sir Edward, with bitterness.

“If residing on my estate, and eating a morsel of bread, and the plainest food, be offensive to you, Sir Edward, I regret it; but it never can be denied her. And where could she go, when denied the shelter of her husband’s roof?”

“There were others in the world, without remaining under those walls that held the destroyer of her happiness, and the life of his wife.”

“You try me severely, Sir Edward. What you say is true; but still there was no guilt towards you, and she who is above would pardon, even if there were.”

“Pardon the man who still enjoys the society of the woman whose folly destroyed her happiness and life! Carlina will laugh with you, as she ever did at such an idea.”

"Carlina will never leave me," said Carlina, I believe, ever since she was never seen her since that day. Mr. Penruddock paused for a moment, mulous with emotion as he was, and I dare not think of, and a few moments he spoke to her, while Sir Edward, evident assertion, remained silent but willing to admit that you were not pable, but he has no offer to make. Edward, may not pardon and forgive, been wretched, miserable, and my days on earth cannot, I think, be long; and I would willingly live in peace with all, but most with the companion of my childhood of my youth. I have not succeeded of my intention; the other, as I refused, I trust I have. It is better that we should part; farewell, Sir Edward. I would not wish to increase the

which your generous nature will hereafter inflict, when you reflect on our last meeting, and lament that you could have soothed a broken heart, and did not. Once more, farewell; we shall meet in happier regions—there you will forgive me for the sorrows of which I have been the partaker, as well as the unfortunate cause;—my prayers shall ever be, as they have been, for the brother of my heart!—Farewell!”

As Mr. Penruddock spoke he moved towards the door; he was leaving the room, when Sir Edward suddenly started, and hastening to join him, he caught the hand of Mr. Penruddock, and pressed it with fervour, saying in a broken voice, “I do forgive, as I hope to be forgiven; and do you, William, pardon my long-cherished anger.” The pressure was returned by Mr. Penruddock with an emotion of pleasure such as he had not experienced for years. Sir Edward then rushed from the apartment, and Mr. Penruddock returned to Astol.

Thus parted two who had been attached as

brothers not always are. They now separated one with renewed affection, the other with the same fraternal feeling, which had not been diminished; yet both with a sincere hope never on earth to meet again. The memory of days long past is proverbially painful, even when passed in happiness; when otherwise, the pangs are increased. There are few who had drained the cup of sorrow more entirely than the Lords of Astol and Westwell; there were no gleams of sunshine for their minds to rest on—all was horror and darkness—there could be, there was no wish with either to renew the agony of the last hour.

CHAPTER V.

Castara, whisper in some dead man's eare
 This subtile quære ; and hee'le point out where,
 By answers negative, true joys abide.
 Hee'le say they flowe not on th' uncertaine tide
 Of greatness ; they can no firme basis have
 Upon the trepidation of a wave.
 Nor lurke they in the caverns of the earth,
 Whence all the wealthy minerals draw their birth,
 To covetous men so fatall.

WALTER Rayland remained several weeks with his family at Paris, and then left them at Brussels, where they intended to pass some months. Another week saw Walter in the heart of London, but London in its most disagreeable form—lonely, melancholy, and deserted,—not a person of fashion to be seen ;—the stillness seemed unnatural ; all were away, save those compelled by necessity, either of business or lack of means, to reside among empty houses and deserted streets. Walter had never before felt the full meaning of the word melancholy—he had often thundered

forth "Hence, vain deluding joys," when his sister was reading their list of engagements; and he would chant, "Hail, divinest melancholy!" and "Join with them calm peace and quiet," in the most cheering tone imaginable, so as to inspire all who heard him with mirth and gaiety; but never, never before had he felt the presence of the goddess whom he wooed; but now he really did feel an unpleasant sensation while pacing the hot, silent, and empty streets. He was compelled to wait a few days, to send some papers to his father; and his only amusement was to think of Laura, and anticipate, in idea, the time when he should be the guest of Sir Edward at Westwell;—then he could renew his acquaintance with Mr. Penruddock and his family; and then he doubted not that his suit would be accepted: he had learned from Sir Edward that the inhabitants of Astol remained in the same secluded state, so there could be no fear of another suitor. While walking up the comparatively empty foot-path, now casting a

glance at the shops, decked out with old finery and old fashions, and now venting his bile on the dilatory proceedings of his father's steward, it was with no small joy that he was interrupted by a shake of the hand, and—"In the name of all the gods, Walter, what brings you to town at this unseasonable and unfashionable time?" burst from the lips of Philip Deverell.

"I may ask the same question of you, Phil," replied Walter, returning his greeting with warmth. "Why are you here at this horridly vulgar and antiquated time?"

" 'My vocation, Hal—'tis my vocation.' "

"I rather thought it had been your vacation!"

"Not to me, alas!—Alas!—what the devil am I talking of; let me rather thank the gods and thee, Walter Rayland, for my present sojourn in this deserted town; why, man, 'twill be the making of me!"

"Will it?—then I wish you joy, Phil, from my heart;—any prospect of preferment?"

"Preferment!—Mr. Rayland, I see the seals—look how they glitter in my sight;—but what a fool you have been, Walter!—I gave you credit for bold generalship, or else I was mistaken in my idea of your heart being entangled at that fag-end-of-the-world place."

"What do you mean?" asked Walter, while an undefinable and unpleasant sensation, such as he had never before experienced, pervaded his whole frame.

"What do I mean!—Why, is it possible that you have not heard all the news of the forest? Why, I mean marriages and settlements, and such like entertainments; but we will not talk of these things in the street. Mum's the word with us lawyers. Come with me, and at my chambers we will talk it over at our leisure; that is, if you can still eat lawyer's fare."

They soon arrived at Philip's chambers, which were evidently improved in size and comfort, and spoke of briefs numerous and well paid. Walter congratulated the young barrister on the alteration he saw.

"I may thank you for it, Sir Walter of the forest."

"Me!—What have I do with it?"

"Every thing,—your nonsensical freak, as I called it, the first morning after we got settled in the forest, and the breakfast was not ready for me when I was ready for it, has been the making of me, Walter. I shall be a great man!"

"With all my heart," said Walter, laughing; "but now dismiss your greatness for a season, and tell me all about it; and wherefore you give me more credit than I dare take on myself till you explain, lest I be shorn of my borrowed plumes?"

"No fear in this case—all's safe—you introduced me to Mr. Penruddock, and Mr. Penruddock has made me his Attorney General, which I expect will be as good a thing for me, as the Attorney Generalship of Lord Eldon was to him."

"This is news indeed!—but how can so re-

tired a man as the master of the Astol estate have the power you seem to anticipate? or what can he have to do with law?" asked Walter while a creeping dread of something disagreeable came over him.

"Why, in the first place, now he looks around him again, he finds a lawyer is wanted to set a right on his domain;—this will be great profit and little trouble."

"Are these things in your way? I thought a barrister had no concern with such law affairs."

"Listen, and I will explain. Two rich persons do me the honour to call me their friend and consult me respecting some law concern requisite at the present moment, they being as completely ignorant of everything relative thereto as if they were born but yesterday. This business not exactly appertaining to me, I nominate a solicitor, who, either out of gratitude, or duly appreciating my ability," said he, laughing "has covered my table with briefs. It is no trifling matter to have the direction of convey

ances, deeds, estates—and then this marriage settlement. When two great estates meet, there is always employment for lawyers!”

Walter had some difficulty to summon courage sufficient to inquire whose marriage settlement he meant; and he had more difficulty to suppress his feelings when Philip answered—Miss Penruddock’s. Fortunately, the young lawyer was too fully occupied with his enumeration of the benefits he expected, to notice the impression these words had made on his auditor, so that Walter was able, with tolerable composure, to inquire the name of the fortunate person who was to possess the estates of Astol, and gain the affections of the heiress.

“You played me a devilish trick there, Walter; I was fool enough to lay a wager that you would be the happy man. You who were there cannot tell how long, but certainly long enough to win a host of heiresses; and that abominable Sir Arthur laughed me to scorn, when he pocketed my twenty guineas,—they were not so

plentiful with me just then. But to answer your question :—the bridegroom elect has little need of the estates, for he is all too rich even now, at least his father is, and they have sent me their title-deeds and rent-roll, so I have the estates to direct also; but, however, the love is a Mr. Meredith, only son and heir to Sir Edward Meredith, of Westwell Park, in the county of Hants, and Merry Wood Dale, in the North, besides half a hundred minor places."

"Stop, Philip! I do believe you have been quizzing me all this time. I have been the travelling companion for several months of Sir Edward Meredith, nor is it many weeks since we separated; and do you think it probable he would not have mentioned this, particularly when I informed him of our forest freak, and acquaintance with the Astol family?"

"Can there be two baronets of the same name?"

"No. I mean the Merediths of Westwell and I am now on my journey to Merry Wood Dale."

"And did he never speak of this alliance?"

"Never."

"It is strange, certainly, but nevertheless true," said Deverell, rising and opening a desk, from which he brought a parchment, saying, "Look there." And Walter, with dismay, read the preamble, full of strange words and sentences, tending to prove the assertion of the lawyer, that these were the marriage articles between——

"Look, Walter,—here is Evelyn Meredith, Esq., son and heir of Sir Edward Meredith, Baronet, of Westwell Park, Merry Wood Dale, &c.; and here is Laura Penruddock, presumptive heiress of Astol Manor, and divers other seats that belong to the lord of the said estates, manors, &c., but of which I find he knows no more than Adam, as they came to him after the death of his wife, when he had forsworn the vanities of this life. To think that a man should grieve so for a woman! It is no uncommon thing to wish a wife in heaven,—but to wish one out is most

uncommon, and to make such a fuss because one has taken her departure is rather singular. But, however, you are convinced now, I hope, that my information is correct?"

"It appears so. But your room is warm and close, and those d——d parchments have such a musty fragrance, that I must have water or wine to sweeten my senses, and clear my understanding."

"Here, Dixon, bring some wine; you shall not drink water while we are discoursing of this alliance. Why, Walter, are you ill? Here, bring water with the wine. There, take the water first and the wine after, one will qualify the other. What a precious lawyer you would make—not able to bear the smell of parchment!"

"It is this devilish sultry town; you know of old, Phil, that the air of London, in the summer, was obnoxious to me."

"Then next week I shall be on my road to Astol Manor—will you be my companion, and let me introduce you, as once you did me?"

"I shall be far in the north, where most probably I shall meet the intended bridegroom, in the house of his father."

"My new client writes me word that we are acquainted; I shame to say that I have forgotten a great man's son; that is not the way to succeed in the world, is it, Walter?"

"Not exactly. However, as you appear now to be in the right road to fame and riches, I will leave you; to-morrow, perhaps, we may meet again."

"As I have those musty parchments, the presence of which is so offensive to you, and painful to me, to prepare in all haste, I must e'en let you go; so farewell for the present."

Poor Walter Rayland, for the first time in his life, was really unhappy, and when the morning came he was in no humour to trifle with the gay spirits of the light-hearted lawyer.— Having word he should be in town the next day, he rode a few miles in the country,

and sought to still the feelings of love in the bustle and noise of the town. Yes, gentle reader, so romantic as to gallop down the street amid the confusion of the soldiers, he endeavoured to lose sight of the sweet Laura Penruddock. And after sailing for several days (East and West), A. Deverell, with colliers from London and other countries, he at length sought to gallop some twenty miles from the town; and when the dusk of evening had to seek a shelter for the night, he galloped home again; stopping at some road-side inn to take a glass of beer and a bottle of bad wine; or, from indigestion, the other a violent headache. He told Philip Deverell the next day, and served to pass the time, and to relieve his usual depression. His night's repose, after such a day, was

troubled with sleep; and when he did forget himself it was not in soft repose, no, the "night-hag" paid him a visit, and told of gallant doings in the bowers of Astol. He was aroused early in the morning by the entrance of his young legal friend, exclaiming, as he shook him by the arm as it lay listlessly on the bed-clothes, "Walter! Walter! where were you yesterday? I sought you all day long, with one who wished most ardently to greet you."

"If you seek me three hours hence you will find me at breakfast. I am tired and in no vein for talking."

"You must listen, though, and answer me, notwithstanding. Three hours hence! It is eleven now; what the devil is come over you? you were once wont to greet the lark. No, no! rise up, Sir Walter of the Forest, and listen while I relate a tale of the real Simon Pure, the veritable Knight of the Woods that is to be. Oh Walter! Walter! why did you not make hay while the sun shone, and not let a little pert hop-

of my-thumb hop in before you. Oh Walter! Walter! but, however, this is not what I came to say; my errand, at this untimely hour, was to tell you that yesterday I was introduced to Evelyn Meredith, Esquire, and heir of Westwell, in Hants, Merry Wood——”

“Spare me the repetition,” said Walter, now thoroughly aroused, “and proceed with your tale.”

“And such a tale! Walter, you shall guess who this young ’squire is, this Evelyn Meredith, heir to——”

“Go on, pray! What of him?”

“Why he is an old acquaintance, man—an old friend with a new face; only we did not happen to know him by name! We had not been so fortunate as to have the honour of an introduction. Now guess, Sir Walter of the Forest.”

“You are preparing me for some ludicrous acquaintance. Is it the short fat young man, in that eternal plum-coloured coat, that used to

row against us so often at Richmond, after he had taken off the said coat, and put on a pink jacket?"

"Wide of the mark. Go on."

"Then, perhaps, it is the young man who came bowing to us at Sir James Melley's, and begged to know if we were cousins to his cousin?"

"No, no, no!"

"The sickly-looking lad at the fancy ball, the night before we planned our delectable forest scheme, whom you ran against and knocked down, with the ice he was carrying to the Duchess of Whirlpool; when he turned out to be a fire-brand, and was going to challenge you, but his Grace of Whirlpool interfered, and would have no names mentioned?"

Philip shook his head.

"Then I can guess no more; there are so many silly, ridiculous young men who have sought an introduction, that I might guess all day."

"And all night too, and yet be as far off as you are now."

"Then why the devil torment me with guessing?"

"To give you the pleasure of a surprise," Philip hummed a few notes, as he said, to get the right tune, and then sang—

Have you not heard a tale of old,
When a gipsy lad was a Knight so bold?

"No, indeed," replied Walter, laughing.—
"And now I must ring, without you incline to play valet?"

"No, don't ring just yet; but in sober sadness I will relate the truth. The son of Sir Edward Meredeth, Baronet, Evelyn Meredeth——"

"I know all the rest, heir and so forth; go on, and say who he is."

"Verily, your old acquaintance and friend—chum—crony—and attendant; neither more nor less than the gipsy boy, whom you took in your wise head,—I mean what I say,—to patro-

size, Sir Walter! and a brave act it was for my benefit."

"Do be serious. You are romancing now?"

"It is a romance, but not of my making. But 'uprouse thee, my merry man,' and I will tell thee all I know."

In wonder and astonishment that almost deprived Walter of the power of dressing, he obeyed the direction of Philip, and they were soon after seated at the breakfast table; one all anxiety to hear, the other quite as ready to tell.

"Your old protégée is very grateful, and speaks highly of your kind, generous temper; he thinks you a 'rara avis;' but he has seen very little of the world, so be not too proud."

"And do you seriously mean to say, and expect me to believe, that the boy we picked up in our forest camp is to be the husband of Laura Penruddock?"

"I do, most seriously."

"He is a child to her."

"No such very great difference; she is not

quite nineteen, and he—too young to commence Benedict certainly—is some twelvemonth younger."

"Eighteen!—not eighteen, ridiculous; Miss Penruddock might scorn the puny boy!"

"Miss Penruddock does not scorn the puny boy. You forget, Sir Walter, the change a few years will make in a growing boy. I don't intend to say that this young squire of the Woodland race is equal to any one of our merry foresters, save in the matter of rank and fortune. I don't presume to make comparisons, or I would say, this gentle gipsy is not to be compared either to Sir Walter of the camp, or Counsellor Deverel, but he is a sightly, well-looking lad, notwithstanding."

"A lad!—a sightly lad, for Laura Penruddock!"

"Well, well, what signifies words?—he really is very handsome, only a little too young."

"Too young indeed."

"Why, Walter, I shall begin to conceive you are not so indifferent as I said you were. Take my advice, enter the lists and contest the field with this young sprig of a forester."

"I shall enter into no contest with a boy!" said Walter, haughtily. Deverel said no more, and they soon after separated.

Walter's reflections were not of a consoling nature; he could not question the account given by Philip, who was too acute and clear-sighted to be deceived; above all, there were the parchments, absolute proof that Laura was certainly going to be married, though they did not so exactly prove that the gipsy-boy was her intended bridegroom, or that he was the son of Sir Edward; but when he recalled many circumstances that struck him as singular in his companion, when they resided at Astol, and also in their first introduction, these, added to the agitation betrayed by Mr. Penruddock when the boy gave the letter that procured him permission to remain, and his extreme anxiety not to leave the

Manor House with Walter, all spoke too plain that the account given by Deverel was correct. What surprised him more than all was the speed with which all this had been arranged. Sir Edward certainly had no ideas on the subject when they parted at Venice, only two months, scarcely that; and yet they had decided on everything, and the settlements were far advanced! Walter reflected on his journey northward, with very different feelings to what he had anticipated. In a few weeks they were, if Sir Edward had not altered his intention, to be at Westwell, what Walter so earnestly desired. Now he would gladly avoid the visit altogether; but how to do that, without betraying his disappointment or slighted love? Laura had given him no reason to suppose his attentions were unpleasant; on the contrary, Walter, without any great stroke of vanity, might suppose he was not indifferent to the young heiress: however, it was useless to waste time on conjectures on what could not

altered, and the rejected suitor set forward on his journey to the north.

Sir Edward Meredeth received him with unfeigned kindness and unabated spirits. He was a complete enigma to Rayland, who could not disguise his own emotions, and was unable to conceive the possibility of Sir Edward being, as he appeared, the truest votary of mirth, and yet the sufferer he had reason to believe him. Never once did he allude to his son, Laura, or Astol. It was most extraordinary, in the opinion of Walter Rayland, who could scarcely give a thought to any other subject, and many a joke he had to endure from the guests of Sir Edward on his bad sportsmanship — he whose gun rarely failed to kill, now sometimes passed the morning without one shot.

The time was nearly expired for their stay at Merry Wood Dale; the guests were beginning to drop off one by one, and still the intended marriage was a secret. Walter, if he had not seen the documents, and knew by Deverel's

manner that he was serious all as a jest. At first he was to commence the subject, but to it in the slightest way he had never surmised, from his own had ever had either wife or preparing for removal to it. Walter could find an opportunity on the subject that wholly en-

"You are strangely altered," said Sir Edward, as they walked at a rapid pace in the baronet's garden. "What have you done with that in you were so natural of many? Your hilarity is gone in others, but, like the sun, gave light and life."

"You are appearing in a more wise," returned Walter, "I never said anything to me of flattery."

"Is it flattery to tell a

health and a good conscience?—that is the total of my commendation. You are young, good health, and nature has given you one of the greatest blessings—a disposition to enjoy the sweets of life, and make light of the bitter. A short interlude of melancholy, for I trust it will be short, has, I hope, no deep source?"

Walter made no reply, and Sir Edward continued.

"We shall want your gayest smiles and lively mien at Westwell, which will be for a short time a scene of merriment. My son—by the bye, I am not certain if I ever mentioned to you that I had such a relative, though you might suppose it by what occurred at that Italian ball; but now it is necessary that this young man should be introduced to the world, more particularly as he is fool enough to wish, at the early age of nineteen, or rather younger, to embellish himself with a wife, and this wife elect an old acquaintance of yours, Walter. I wish Heaven you had secured her for yourself; by

which I felt certain was a sufficient introduction to Astol."

"But the difficulty was to find an opportunity for presenting it. Mr. Penruddock would neither see strangers nor receive letters."

Sir Edward did not forget his own strong objection, nor the oath taken by Evelyn; but he wished to ascertain if his son had held that promise sacred. Walter's recital gave him satisfaction, while, at the same time, it created a more kindly feeling towards Evelyn, as it was evident that he had made every exertion to avoid using the document.

"And what impression," asked Sir Edward, "did the manners and conversation of Mr. Meredith give you—you must have discovered that he was not in his real character?"

"We all decided on that before he had been an hour in our camp. What do I think of him now—it is two years since, and if you call him a boy now, what must he have been then?"

Your opinion, evidently, is not favourable?"

You are much mistaken; I was considering much superior he might now be to the young men, as he was then to boys of his age. I thought him a remarkably clever, talented, intellectual person, with a strong tinge of romance, extremely sensitive, and prone to dwell on the mournful side of life."

That was not the disposition either of his father or myself."

From what you have related of his history, I could say it was circumstances and education made him so different: had he been the eldest heir of Westwell, and the petted child of Edward Meredeth, he might have been as talented and unintellectual as he is now the second son."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Sir Edward, laughing. "But you, Walter, would have been far more to my taste. When I see my father, I will propose an exchange—

"Would I could have his Harry and he mine!"

During the journey, Sir Edward informed Walter of the brief interview he had with Penruddock, and its consequences, adding, he must and would endeavour to conquer emotion that came over him at the remembrance of past events and past happiness.

"Your opinion, evidently, is not favourable?"

"You are much mistaken; I was considering how much superior he might now be to the young men, as he was then to boys of his age. I thought him a remarkably clever, talented, and intellectual person, with a strong tinge of romance, extremely sensitive, and prone to dwell on the mournful side of life."

"That was not the disposition either of his mother or myself."

"From what you have related of his history, I should say it was circumstances and education that made him so different: had he been the cherished heir of Westwell, and the petted child of Sir Edward Meredeth, he might have been as untalented and unintellectual as he is now the reverse."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Sir Edward, laughing. "But you, Walter, would have been far more to my taste. When I see your father, I will propose an exchange—

'Would I could have his Harry and he mine!'

But Evelyn waited for no introduction. "My dear father! my kind friend!" burst from his heart and lips. Sir Edward was really affected by his son's fervent greeting, and Evelyn's delight at renewing his intimacy with Walter proved that Walter was not mistaken when he termed him sensitive. Had Rayland heard the tale of Evelyn's early years, he would have felt no surprise at his having a superabundance of that troublesome quality, and the singular position in which Sir Edward and his son appeared would have caused him less wonder.

"You are very much altered, Mr. Rayland," said Evelyn, as they were taking their wine after their dinner on the first evening of their arrival at Westwell.

"Exactly the same remark that I made yesterday, Walter," observed Sir Edward.

"I am not conscious of any change; but I trust it is a change for the better."

"I have been asking myself that question," said Evelyn, "and I fear I have decided in the

negative; but when we ride over to Astol, Laura and Lucy shall settle the point. Two years is a long time—we can scarcely expect you could remain unaltered.”

“Two months is not,” observed Sir Edward, “and the change I perceive has taken place in that space.”

“I may change again ere the same number of days are passed and gone.”

“I trust you will. I like not this doleful strain; if you patronize sentiment, I shall forswear your company. I am a sworn enemy to every thing of the kind.”

Sir Edward gave a side glance at his son, as if to say, “There is too much of it there.”

“Pray, Mr. Meredeth,” asked Walter, “are there many changes at the Manor House—are all my old friends and kind nurses well?”

“I was not aware till I arrived here to-day that you were my father's guest, else I should have had messages from all; you were a general favourite; only Mrs. Weston gives you credit

for rather embellishing any tale you may be relating."

"Or what is called shooting with a long bow. How is this, Walter, I have not found out this quality in you?"

"Why, to tell the truth, I did make the most of the improvements that have taken place since Mr. Penruddock commenced his state of seclusion, and Mrs. Weston was even ignorant of some that had occurred before. But the young ladies, are they well?"

"Laura I think is not quite so cheerful, so gay as she used to be, but it is only a slight shade of difference; Lucy is wild as ever."

Evelyn proposed to call with Walter at the Manor House the next day, but Walter had no pressing wish to behold Laura, as the betrothed of the boy he had himself introduced to her notice, or indeed as the betrothed of any one but himself, he therefore made some slight excuse; adding, "Mr. Penruddock may have no wish to renew an intimacy so strangely forced

on him, and I have no desire to intrude on any one, particularly one who seems to hold no very favourable opinion of mankind."

Evelyn entered with so much warmth into the merits of Mr. Penruddock's character, and spoke so highly—so enthusiastically of his talents and virtues, that Walter had no plea left for refusing, when Sir Edward suddenly rose, saying, "There will be sufficient time for these visits," and then proposed leaving the table. The singularity of the master of the house being the first to move made Walter observe him, and he was surprised and shocked to see the same wild undescribable expression of features that he had before noticed in Sir Edward; and the glance that the father gave the son reminded Walter of the feelings that were yet only blunted, not destroyed; it was too early to speak casually of events recalling such painful reminiscences. Walter from that time avoided mentioning the Manor House, or its inhabitants, when Sir Edward was present.

Since the projected union between the house of Westwell and Astol, some attempts had been made to form a communication; ditches had been filled and brushwood removed, so as to leave a bridle-path tolerably clear and open. The morning after the arrival of Sir Edward at the Park, a messenger was despatched to the Manor House, with a letter and a small box for Miss Penruddock, who was sitting with Lucy in the sea-turret. The bright beams of an autumnal sun shone gaily into the apartment, giving a life and brilliancy to all around save the young mistress of the domain, who silent and pensive appeared deeply engaged with some hidden abstraction, from which her companion vainly endeavoured to draw her attention. After a pause of some duration Lucy suddenly broke the silence, saying, "After all, Laura, when I think seriously on the subject, I am half inclined to jilt Reuben."

"Jilt Reuben!" said Laura, looking up with surprise, "and why, pray?"

"Because ever since these marriages have been planned and arranged, we have been very dolorous and pensive; now if this is to last through our lives, I certainly shall prefer to remain as I am, or rather as I have been, for I have caught the infection from you, Laura; I am not half so light-hearted as I used to be: I had an idea that married life was all happiness and joy."

"So no doubt you will find it, Lucy, you have been so long and so sincerely attached to Reuben."

"And are you not attached to Evelyn, to Mr. Meredith?"

Laura made no reply, till Lucy repeated her question, when she languidly answered, "Sincerely attached, to be sure I am."

"My dear Laura," said Lucy, taking her hand affectionately, "I tremble when I think that your heart is not in this business."

"I know no reason why you should think so, Lucy; I never was so vivid in my enjoyments as

you are; but what has Margaret brought?" said she, interrupting herself.

Margaret, with her usual quiet manner, placed a box and letter before her mistress and retired. Laura was as ready as Lucy to see the contents of the parcel; the letter was from Evelyn, enclosing a small key, and begging her acceptance of the contents of the casket, which contained a superb and complete set of brilliants.

"These are very splendid, I dare say," said Laura.

"Oh, no doubt," said Lucy, "or they would not have been sent; but we are so little used to these things we do not know the value of them. I will call Mrs. Weston, she will teach us to appreciate them."

Mrs. Weston spoke largely as to their worth and beauty, declaring they were far superior to those possessed by Laura's mother.

"And where are those jewels, Mrs. Weston?" asked Lucy.

"All locked up with my Lady's things, where

they have remained since we lost her : I suppose your father will have them brought out, Miss Laura, before your wedding ; but if he does not mention them, I shall never venture to do so. But will Mr. Meredith be here at dinner ?”

“ No,” replied Laura, “ this letter tells me he will remain at Westwell all day.”

When Weston had retired Lucy appeared to have caught the infection of thoughtfulness from her companion, and it was now her turn to be silent and abstracted. When Laura inquired if she were thinking of the best way of jilting Reuben, she replied, “ No, but I am pondering on a piece of information I heard this morning.”

“ You are altered indeed,” said Laura, laughing, “ to have news one whole hour in your possession, and keep it all that time to yourself.”

“ I’m not sure, though,” said Lucy, “ if I have done wisely in mentioning it at all.”

“ Do you mean to keep it quite to yourself, Lucy ?”

"Why, no; who do you think, Laura, is a visiter at Westwell Park?"

"How can I tell; Evelyn, I suppose; for I know no other person who goes there."

"I said a visiter; Mr. Meredith is at home. Guess again."

"Reuben Barwell?"

"Nonsense!—name some other person."

"How can I, Lucy, when we know none other; you don't mean to say my father's gone on a visit to Westwell?"

"Oh, no; but we did know some other persons a year or two ago." A slight blush passed over Laura's face; she made no answer, and Lucy continued.

"Well then, I suppose I must tell you that our friend from the gipsy camp, Mr. Rayland, is now staying at Westwell."

The colour was a little heightened in Laura's cheeks as she answered, "Then I wonder he has not been here to see us."

"Oh, he only arrived last night with Sir

Edward. Mr. Meredith's man told Brenner, and Brenner told Margaret, and Margaret told me," said Lucy, laughing, "that Sir Edward and Mr. Rayland were companions and great cronies when abroad, and so I suppose he is come down now to be bridesman to Mr. Meredith!"

Laura's changing colour gave evidence that she did consider this news of some consequence; but she busied herself with the casket, and soon after left the turret. Lucy sighed deeply when Laura left the room.

"These are splendid baubles," said she, looking at the casket; "but I much question if she would not have found more happiness in a lower station, at least, comparatively lowly; for the heiress of ten thousand a year must always be in superior life." Lucy mused and reflected for more than an hour—a most unusual circumstance. How long these meditations might have continued is uncertain, but her reflections were

dispelled by the return of
she entered the room,

"Now, Lucy, I've new
were to serve you as you d
you puzzling some half an
and astonish you at once.
is Tuesday—well, then, the
Thursday, we are to go to
be introduced to the world!

"Westwell Park! you can
Weston is laughing at you!

"No, indeed; it was r
Weston and Margaret are b
in directing our packages, tl
them up."

"Well, this is astonishing
sons most concerned, sit her
about it! But, Laura, are
at the idea—to be introduced

"I mean the world at W
Laura, laughing; "that wil
as the world in general."

"Terrific enough for those who never expected to pass through the park gates!"

"Pray how did you expect to reach the Grange, when you became Mrs. Barwell? I forgot to tell you one part of my story," said Laura; "there is a sister of Sir Edward's, some foreign lady, who will be there to receive us, and play the hostess."

"But how are we to go?" asked Lucy. "I have often heard Reuben say there is no road within three or four miles of the Manor house."

"I suppose my father has arranged all this; if not, it will be useless for us to attempt it."

But Lucy could think of nothing else; and the next day was past in a succession of hopes and fears, terrors and surmises.

It may be supposed that this visit was an event of importance to two females brought up in such complete seclusion, and who, since their childhood, had only seen two persons unconnected with the dwelling in which they resided: it so occupied their attention, as to keep them waking

during the night, and they neither of them appeared to advantage when they were in that Reuben, Mr. Groves, and Brenner waiting to escort them to Westwell.

"Pray, Reuben," said Lucy, who ran before her companion to have a little gossip with her lover, "where is Mr. Meredith? so it was his duty to attend Miss Penruddock father's house!" Lucy was scarcely satisfied when informed that law business called him home, but he hoped to meet them on the morrow. And now, the first time for many years they passed through the lodge. They had never either of them been accustomed to riding, it was Mr. Penruddock kept no horses: but there was no fatigue either to Laura or Lucy from the clearances that had been lately made in the forest enabled them to pursue their walk without difficulty. It was a curious circumstance to see the heiress of large estates proceeding in so strange a manner to the dwelling of her intended bridegroom, on foot, attended only by

aged domestics, and two who were only by courtesy entitled to the rank of companions. To Reuben, who had seen more of the world than the rest, it appeared very singular; but the two maidens thought not of it; they were fully occupied with the idea of the world they were about to enter. Poor Margaret complained much to Brenner of the fatigue she was experiencing, she who had never walked a mile for the last twelve years; and little as she was given to talking, she now poured forth her lamentations in the most copious manner. Brenner began to fear she never would be able to continue; he was equally tired of her complaints, and of the weight that pressed heavily on his arm, when to his great joy, after they had proceeded about four miles, the forest glades were sufficiently wide to admit a carriage to pass freely, keeping a foot pace and using caution. To Laura and Lucy this vehicle was a source of wonder, which increased every moment after they had passed the wilder parts of the forest,

and began to witness some
tion and habitation. When
a mile or two of Westwell,
may at the idea of the " "
meet, and was, like Laura,
" that " she saw. The lo
intervals, which at first cal
of delight, were now succee
tial farm-houses, with all t
characteristic appurtenance
left the forest, the open cou
fore them, churches and vi
sion, with Southampton and
in the background, and b
splendid mansion of Westv
was too new and entrancing
her delight in words. But
was unbounded. On ente
passing through the park,
recover from these overpower
park scenery they were a
Lucy's fears of the " world "

full force, when they stopped at the hall door. Both Laura and Lucy were greatly relieved when they saw Evelyn standing alone on the steps to receive them: he was by the carriage in an instant, and opening the door he welcomed them most heartily to Westwell. "Dearest Laura," said he, as he led her up the steps, "I thought you would never be here! I have been waiting some hours, and I was afraid to come and meet you, fearing to miss you in the glades. You tremble, Laura, are you not well?"

"Oh, quite well; but I am terrified at the thought of meeting so many strangers."

"You need not be alarmed at that yet. I arranged with my father to take our guest out on a sail, and they will not be home till a late dinner; so you will have plenty of time to recover and prepare for what will certainly be a large party to you; but they are all prepared to love you, Laura, and were very unwilling to be absent on your arrival. Was I right in persuading them to stay away?"

"Quite right; and that being so considerate."

When Laura and Lucy, after refreshment, and recovery from fright, they were conducted to apartments prepared for them, passed through the same magnificent staircases, and decorated her mother had so often warned this Laura was ignorant. Her mother had been the chief of a gorgeous palace, and her life mingled with those painful scenes she must have felt, had she known of her mother's early life.

Evelyn accompanied them to the dressing-room, and then entered, she had inspected the contents of the trunk that had arrived from London, and he would show her some of the Westwell. Lucy's opinion, however, was quite sufficient to decide wh

played that evening, and whispering to Laura that "loveliness needed no ornament," he left her to follow Lucy, who was standing the very personification of surprise; and Laura felt an equal degree of wonder at seeing two rather pretty and very smart young ladies standing beside Margaret, who looked a happy, or, to speak more properly, unhappy compound of patience, resignation, and despair. There could scarcely be a greater contrast than was exhibited in the quiet, sedate demeanour of Margaret, and the showy, pert, and mincing manner of her companions. One had a lilac-coloured silk dress, with a pink and white toque, or something between a toque and a turban; the other was in a light-green silk, with a profusion of lace and pink ribbon on her head, small white lace aprons, trimmed with ribbon to correspond with their dresses, lace collars, fastened with gay, if not costly, brooches, and glittering long-drop ear-rings; while Margaret, with a gown of sober hue, with a cap of snowy white-

ness, fitting close to the very small portion of her muslin handkerchief pinned and crossed over in front of a real large white lawn apron, a picture of neatness and niceness.

When Lucy, who was interested in the dressing-room, entered the room, she was surprised at beholding visitors. She then returned the compliments, and made with such grace and gracefulness that she looked to Margaret for explanation, but Margaret gave none. Never very dumb, she was absolutely dumb, requiring no glance. Lucy required no necessary that some one was just commencing with the ladies would be seated, when they condescended to sit down. Ordered by the Countess the young ladies from

PENRUDDOCK.

while their looks seemed to say, "Well for young ladies, for that elderly person would not know how to arrange the finery just sent down."

Neither Laura nor Lucy could properly appreciate the beauty and elegance of the assortment which was spread before them, there were so many things of which they neither knew the name nor the utility, that they began to feel the value of the attendants provided them, and to estimate the care of the Countess. When Laura had bestowed some time on inspection, she returned to the gallery, where Evelyn was in waiting.

CHAPTER VII.

Where throngs of knights and b
In weeds of peace high triumph
With store of ladies, whose brig
Rain influence, and adjudge the
Of wit or arms, while both cont
To win her grace whom all com

“ AND now, Laura,” said Ev
dertake the office of showman, i
as I can who all these same ga
looking personages are, as me
the honour of being ancestors
stance, this is Lady Mary S
grandmother, and here are he
grandfather Sir George loo
you ; and mine, Sir Henry M
the same kind aspect ; and this
tell who this is ?”

“ Oh, yes ; but my heart
than the features. This is th

mother, but much younger than those at the Manor House."

"I am told it is a great resemblance, but this you cannot know. This is mine—but very unlike what she is now."

"Now, Evelyn—is Lady Meredith living?"

"If it can be called living—if sorrow, illness, and partial insanity can be called living, she is still alive."

"Then is she here?—and may I see her, Evelyn?"

"Will you, Laura—will you go with me to visit her? This is what she wishes."

"Visit her! Does she not live with you and her husband?"

Evelyn shook his head. "I know not the cause, dearest Laura, but my father and mother have been separated from the time of my infancy:—my mother is now residing at the cottage where I was brought up, and which you know by the name of Woodend. It is not far, and if one day you will accompany me, it will gratify both, I cannot say how highly."

"Whenever you please
panion."

"Thanks, dearest Laura
aunt, the Countess Bertini
to her; and this, my dear
ruddock, of whom you have

"And whom I am fully
but you, Evelyn, are wanted
to play the hostess with Miss

Laura was soon at her ease
who conducted her to the
they remained till a servant
quest to see the Lady Bertini
in a few moments after the
opened, when a stranger, who
judged to be Sir Edward
He had dreaded the first inter-
fearing lest the agitation which
not be able to control would
family. It had been Sir Edward
through life to conceal his
world; they gave not such in-
they were known only to himse-

Fortunately for Sir Edward, Laura was so confused and agitated with so many introductions, that his emotion was unobserved; she did not even hear the words he addressed to her, and Sir Edward was apparently composed before the frightened girl was able to understand the meaning of the welcome which the master of the house was tendering.

The first sensation over, Sir Edward soon recovered, and endeavoured to dispel the recollections suggested by the presence of Laura, while his kind and fascinating manner soon removed the terror with which she had anticipated this meeting,—though why she knew not;—she had never heard more of Sir Edward than what was related by Evelyn, but that was sufficient to create an opinion very different to the impression she now received, and Laura wondered at the dread she had felt at the idea of this introduction.

Though recovered from his first interview, a painful sensation still lingered with Sir Edward.



in present meeting. The interest
of Walter Smith, he feared, never
and he almost determined to pass
part and for the moment. The next
business—a letter from his father—
would serve for all the
day. They must meet tomorrow to
discuss the financing of the In-
ter. Macdonald was equally solicitous.
No, he must meet like a man—
painted struggle, but with resolu-
tion he should conquer. He wished
Federal Park had been larger. He
felt less difficulty in concealing his

well interrupted these reflections,
withstanding his dejection and
a parting glance at the sur-
roundings. If all was correct in his ap-
proach, he would not allow himself to think
of the passages to the draw-
ing. As all assembled, and

The form and manner of Laura so exactly resembled her mother, that, like Mr. Penruddock, Sir Edward could almost fancy he saw Florence Stanley, in youth and beauty, again before him as she moved among the flowers and shrubs on the terrace : his sensations were too painful, at the entrance of the Countess Bertini to conduct Laura to her dressing-room was a great relief to those feelings, which, so keenly sensitive, were yet so anxiously concealed.

There was another heart at Westwell Park which throbbed with painful intensity at the approaching meeting. Walter Rayland knew that Laura had arrived ; in one short hour they would again be in the same room. He should once more see the being who had been the object of his affections for the last two years. He would see her again,—but how ? As the betrothed almost the wife, of another. She whom he had so fondly and with so much certainty hoped to call his own ; they had parted as lovers, though not proclaimed, yet still lovers. How different

would be their present meeting! The hitherto buoyant spirits of Walter sunk, he feared never to rise again, and he almost determined to play the coward's part, and fly the contest. He need only pretend business,—a letter from his father,—or illness, any excuse would serve; but no, that would be dastardly, they must meet hereafter; he would not relinquish the friendship of Sir Edward, and Mr. Meredeth was equally solicitous to gain his. No, he must meet it like a man,—it would be a painful struggle, but, with resolution, he trusted he should conquer; he wished the circle at Westwell Park had been larger, he might then have less difficulty in concealing his feelings.

The dinner-bell interrupted these reflections, and Walter, notwithstanding his dejection and despair, still gave a parting glance at the mirror, to ascertain if all was correct in his appearance. He would not allow himself to think as he hastily traversed the passages to the drawing-room. The party were all assembled, and

Walter, at first sight, could not distinguish Laura from Lucy: they were both grown—both altered—both improved. His tremor, fortunately for his own good opinion, for which Walter had much value, took not the appearance of timidity, but on the contrary it gave an appearance of eagerness to meet friends from whom he had so long been separated. Sir Edward, as host, came forward a few steps, then stopped, saying “There is no need of introduction; Mr. Rayland is an old friend of yours I believe, young ladies.”

The first interview over, all went well. Walter took a little more wine than usual, and the evening passed, if not pleasantly, yet without the extreme misery he had anticipated; and there is something soothing in being in the same room with those we love, even though that love is unreturned and unregarded.

When at night Laura and Lucy retired to their dressing-room, they found Margaret in attendance. “Ah, Margaret,” said Laura, “I am glad to see you are alone.”

"Miss Wilson and Miss Dixey will be here immediately, Ma'am."

"Miss who?" inquired Laura.

"Miss Wilson and Miss Dixey, the ladies who dressed you this morning."

"We would rather not have them, Margaret, we would much rather have you to attend us."

Before Margaret had time to answer Misses Wilson and Dixey entered, and Margaret, sighing heavily, left the room. Laura was at first tempted to call her back, but recollecting that it would be better to arrange it on the morrow, she allowed the young lady in lilac to take off her dress, while the young lady in green performed the same office for Lucy.

"I beg your pardon, Mem," said the young lady in lilac, "for keeping you waiting, but there are so many passages in this house, we mistook the turning, and we knew Mistress Margaret was here. Will you allow me to assist you on with your dressing gown? Will you be pleased, Mem, to take a chair,—nice

easy chair,—by this nice little cosey fire? I thought you would like a fire, Mem; though the days are warm the evenings are cold; there is another fire in the other dressing-room, if you prefer them separate, Mem."

"Thank you," said Lucy, "this room is sufficiently large for both."

"Then, Mem, we'll have t'other easy chair brought to the fire," and the young lady in lilac motioned to the young lady in green to bring the reclining chair forward for Lucy, who was thus placed opposite to Laura—a most unfortunate position for the gravity of both. These lady-attendants were so different to all they had seen before, that they had great difficulty in preserving any degree of composure.

"Which way, Mem, will you allow me to arrange your hair?" said the lady in lilac, who appeared to take the lead.

Laura looked at Lucy for an answer, ^{they} only knew one way.

"Would your ladyship prefer," said she of

the green dress, who having accompanied a lady to Paris, prided herself on being able to speak French, "to have your hair arranged 'Haw la Medonne,'—'O' ringlay,'—or 'O' frizon.'"

This was too much for Lucy, who before had great difficulty in restraining her mirth, she was now completely overcome, and burst into a loud, and, as the lilac damsel thought, unlady-like laugh. It was impossible to escape the infection, and Laura laughed as heartily, while the gay maidens who stood at their respective chairs were silent images of surprise and astonishment.

Laura felt that some remark was necessary for their rudeness. "We are laughing at our own ignorance," said she; "I prefer my hair in ringlets."

"Most becoming, certainly, Mem; but if you will allow me, I will bring part of this hair forward, so as to have it 'A la Medonne' in the morning, and ringlets in the evening; the 'Medonne' is best for riding lessons."

"I am not aware that we are going to take

riding lessons," said Laura; "but arrange the hair as you please."

"Yes, Mem—I beg pardon, but I thought you were going to ride, as Mr. Clark said the riding-master was coming to-morrow, and he heard Mr. Meredith giving orders to his groom about having the ladies' horses prepared." A silence ensued, Laura and Lucy each took a book, that they might no longer offend their attendants by giving way to mirth.

This pause continued till one of the attendants requested some commands respecting the dresses for the next day, making use, at the same time, of many technical, and to them familiar terms, but to our poor novices they were Greek or algebra, and they were constrained to acknowledge their ignorance. The waiting ladies were too well bred to betray any surprise, and the lady in lilac observed, "Possibly the terms were altered since Miss Penruddock was in London," and she took the liberty of inquiring the name of the dress-maker whom they patronized.

Neither Laura nor Lucy knew how to silence person by a look ; they felt compelled to answer, even though questioned by a domestic, and the surprise of the waiting damsels quite overcame their respectful breeding. The young ladies had never been in London—they absolutely stared with astonishment. The lady in lilac then ventured to suggest, “that possibly Paris had the honour of supplying them with dresses?” “No, they had never been at Paris, and they had nothing French belonging to them.” As the conceit, and mincing airs of the waiting maids now ceased to amuse, and were beginning to tire, Laura and Lucy thought to silence them at once, by telling them “they had never been out of Hampshire, in which county they were born and bred!”

“Dear me, me’em, then you must have honoured Southampton by employing some dress-maker there. Dear me, was it Mrs. Thursk or Mrs. Wadding you obliged, me’em?”

“Neither,” said Lucy; “we employ no

one." And Laura remarked, "That they should require no more attendance that night."

"No more attendance! Dear me, me'em, have only arranged your hair."

"That is quite sufficient, I thank you."

"Will you not allow me to place your *bouche de nuit*?"

This offer was declined, and the attendants retired, shrugging their shoulders at the idea of young ladies who could put on their own night caps, and take off their own shoes.

"It's more than I do for myself," said Miss Dixey; "I always stipulate, when I engage with a lady, that the upper housemaid should attend on me!"

"I don't bargain for it," replied Miss Wilson; "but I always take care to have it done, and I should like to see her leave the room before I'm safe in bed."

"And now, Laura," said Lucy, "let us draw nearer to this cosey fire, as the young ladies called it, and talk over the events of the day."

"Are you quite sure, Lucy," replied Laura, "that this is not a dream?"

"I was obliged to give myself two or three inches during the evening," returned Lucy, "to be quite certain that I was wide awake!"

"You are satisfied now, I hope, Lucy?"

"Why, yes; and by your hoping it, Laura, you are satisfied too."

"That does not follow as a matter of course; but really, I scarcely know how to define my sensations; this is all so different from the quiet life we have hitherto led, that I feel quite bewildered."

"One need not wonder at that," thought Lucy. "Two lovers together, in such a case it is rather puzzling how to act." This idea Lucy wisely kept to herself, and she never gave Laura the slightest hint that she remembered her former partiality for Walter Rayland.

"And you, Lucy, what are your sensations respecting our present situation?"

"Very delightful ones, I assure you; and I

particularly admire Sir Edward, as being most fascinating and charming. Did you attend to what he said respecting the Barwells at dinner?"

"No, indeed," replied Laura; "but if he said anything in praise of them, I am not surprised that you admire him!"

"You may laugh, Laura; but I say, as Sir Edward did, that they are a most respectable family, almost as old as the Merediths, or even the Penruddocks; and he spoke highly of Reuben, as being a very talented, clever young man, and he wondered Evelyn did not make him stay dinner, and desired that he might be invited for to-morrow. Did you really hear nothing of all this, Laura?"

"No, indeed, Lucy; and I really do beg Reuben Barwell's pardon, and yours too, for being so inattentive."

The conversation here ended, and they soon forgot their unusual excitement in repose. When Laura opened her eyes the next morning, she

perceived Margaret sitting alone in the room, and once more congratulated herself on seeing her old attendant.

"And now, Margaret," said she, "do lock the door, and keep those fine ladies away; you can assist Lucy and me as you have ever done."

"No, indeed, Miss Laura," said Margaret, mournfully, "I neither know the names nor the use of half the things I see, and I came to ask you to let me go back to the Manor House."

"What, leave Lucy and me all alone?"

"Oh, not alone, Miss Laura; there is Mr. Rayland, and Mr. Meredith, with all the rest of the fine people, and they will all be kind to you and Miss Moreton; and there are more fine people coming, and nobody will laugh at you."

"And nobody will laugh at you, Margaret."

"They all laugh at me, Miss Laura, except Mrs. Williams, who is a very respectable person, and she is very angry with them; but she cannot manage those who belong to her room; in

the servants' hall she can rule,—but the ladies and gentlemen, as Miss Wilson calls them,—the upper servants, are of as much consequence, if not more, than Mrs. Williams herself."

"Pray, Margaret, which is Miss Wilson?"

"The one in lilac; the other, in green, is Miss Dixey; and I'm sure no such conceited dressed dolls ever came to the Manor House with the great ladies who used to visit there in former times. Indeed, Miss Laura, I must go home."

"But if I speak to the Countess, Margaret, she will talk to Mrs. Williams about it, and then she will take care that you are not made so uncomfortable."

"They call me Mrs. Prim, and ask me to take them to the meeting-house with me, and then they sigh and groan, and shake their heads; and Mr. Brinkley, Mr. Meredeth's gentleman, asked me how many months I had been absent from the Ark, and how I left grandfather Noah? and then they all set up a laugh; and

then Miss Dixey said it was a shame to laugh, for mine was a very becoming dress, and if I would give her the pattern, she would send it to a fashionable dress-maker in town, and, no doubt, next winter it would be all the rage; and then they all laughed again; and indeed, Miss Laura, I must go home."

"So you shall, Margaret; but how shall we manage it—you will be too tired to walk again?"

"There is a very respectable young man in the servants' hall, whose friends live in the forest, and he says there is a horse in the stable that I can ride, and he has offered to lead it for me."

"That will do exceedingly well, Margaret; I really should be sorry to have you tormented in the way you mention."

Margaret's description of her distresses caused some reflection in the minds of both the forest maidens, whether they might not also be objects of derision to their companions; this idea, however, was soon dispelled. It was evident, even



-
they had witnessed the p

CHAPTER VIII.

We have lived asunder
Too long to meet again—and now to meet !
Have I not cares enow, and pangs enow,
To bear alone, that we must mingle sorrows,
Who have ceased to mingle love ?

THE gaiety and excitement that prevailed at Westwell, did not prevent Laura from reminding Evelyn of the promised introduction to his mother. Lady Meredith was too unwell to receive her at first; but when sufficiently recovered, she expressed the strongest desire to embrace the daughter of her friend, and a day was fixed for the interview. The morning was calm but dull, when Laura prepared to accompany Evelyn to the cottage at Woodend. They were both silent and thoughtful; after passing the park boundary, they entered a small copse and followed a winding path which at length opened on a quiet and sequestered spot, embellished

with every charm of nature ; its seclusion might have suited a devotee, while the building, with its flowery lawn, was unique in beauty, and would have formed a fairy bower for the month of wedded happiness. Laura was surprised and delighted with the calmness and picturesque effect of the cottage and its attendant scenery.

" And was this your home of infancy, Eve ? It is a garden of Eden. You spoke of me as melancholy, surely you could never have felt it here."

" My disposition may be naturally inclined to gloom, and remember, I was surrounded by elderly persons, and that, no doubt, had its effect. What is your opinion, Laura, of my position ? do you consider it too much inclined to the sad or pensive ?"

" Neither sad nor melancholy ; but thoughtful, very thoughtful, and perhaps pensive."

" And do you wish me otherwise ? I will cease to think, if thought displeases you."

" Oh no," replied Laura ; " man is desirous

as 'a reflecting animal,' but I think it would be an improvement if reflection sometimes gave way to mirth."

The observation of Laura had not the effect of creating the cheerfulness she commended. Evelyn sighed deeply, and they soon entered the veranda by which the cottage was surrounded. Evelyn left his companion in a small drawing-room, while he went to announce her arrival to his mother, who was in a larger room, at the back part of the building, looking on a piece of lawn enclosed with dark and high evergreens, so as to create an artificial gloom at mid-day. There were no flowers to enliven the dark green of the holly, not even the red berries on the mountain ash were visible, to break the monotony of the dark and fading green. It seemed the chosen abode of dulness; and the change from the front of the cottage, which might have been taken as the bower of Flora, to the sombre prospect behind, was singularly striking. The room itself was not calculated to inspire any feel-

ings of cheerfulness, being as plainly furnished as was consistent with neatness and a small portion of comfort; but that portion was small indeed: and when Laura entered the room, a sensation of sadness crept over her, which the appearance of its occupant did not diminish. She was prepared to see an invalid, but not one in such extreme ill health as the person that now met her view.

Lady Meredith was supported by pillows in a large reclining chair. Evelyn named Laura as he led her to his mother, who made no reply, and remained a few moments apparently without sensation: after a short pause, she gazed earnestly and silently at Laura; her countenance was already too pale for any change of colour to take place, but the expression showed she was suffering greatly.

"You are not so well to-day, my dear mother," said Evelyn.

Lady Meredith made no reply, but looked, rather than asked, for some drops that were on

an adjoining table : while Evelyn was giving them, Laura whispered to him that she would retire, but the invalid made a slight motion for her to remain. When she had taken the drops she appeared to revive, and soon after was able to make some remark on her own weakness, adding, "it was so long since she had seen a stranger; if they would allow her a few moments, she would soon be better." She then closed her eyes, and Laura had time to notice the sombre garden, the room, and its inhabitant. She had some difficulty in persuading herself that the pale, wasted form before her could be the wife of the gay and fascinating Sir Edward Meredith. This female appeared ten, if not twenty, years older; and whatever beauty she might have possessed in her youthful days, had now totally disappeared. This was Laura's first impression; her second was, that there had been beauty,—the features were fine, and when at length she permitted her eyes to be seen, they were beautiful beyond all that Laura could

imagine. Evelyn proposed to shorten "their visit and return some other day." To this his mother objected, saying,

"No, Evelyn, I shall soon be better; but the sight of this young lady has recalled the past so strongly, that I could almost fancy the last fourteen years to have been a dream."

"Would it were a dream!" she added, in a low voice, and with a slight convulsive shudder. Evelyn could understand why she should wish so many years of sorrow and loss of reason to be merely a vision, though he knew not the deep cause she had for depression. He attempted to soothe and bring her mind to the present moment: in this he at last succeeded, and Lady Meredith, before they departed, was sufficiently composed to converse with calm, but still sad serenity.

After passing an hour with the invalid, Evelyn proposed retiring; his mother made no attempt to delay their departure: though gratified by the presence of Laura, yet the sad ideas that

would naturally arise were too overpowering for a weak frame and broken mind. Though Carlina had recovered from the dreadful feeling that for years had harrowed her very soul,—though with her recovered reason she was no longer haunted with the dreadful visions of the past, as being the result of her folly, her guilt;—though she still mourned and lamented the effect, yet she no longer considered herself as the sole cause of the fatal catastrophe, nor could she by any endeavour assign a cause. It was a mysterious and fatal ending to what had no commencement. She at length persuaded herself it must be the hand of Heaven, to prevent four persons from being too absorbed in the happiness of this mortal life,—to wean them from its cares, and prepare them for a better; and if a murmur would sometimes arise at the recollection of the first years of her wedded life,—the bliss she then enjoyed, and its abrupt and fatal termination,—she would hasten to her small oratory, and by prayer and meditation endeavour

to subdue the moment
one cheerful idea, one
her departing spirit; but
to unite again the
Astol; he would be the
one he sincerely loved,
that the sorrows she
considered a sufficient
her Evelyn might here
too good—too amiable, to
to bewail. He would be
consoling reflection Carl
herself; and this union w
ship, the brotherly affectio
between Sir Edward and
She felt she should not live
ful event; her spirit was
supposition would soothe her
After the first introduct
peated the visit to Woode
occasionally her companion
week the spirits and health

peared to revive, and Evelyn gave way to the hope that his mother would not only be restored to health, but that a re-union with his father would renew her happiness,—a mere hope, but while it lasted it gave joy to Evelyn, who was now decidedly one among the gayest of the party at Westwell. Of the principal persons there he was certainly the most prominent in the way of hilarity, and Sir Edward, Walter Rayland, and Laura, although naturally gay, appeared the reverse; a stranger would have said that Evelyn was the only cheerful person of the party immediately concerned; the visitors were as visitors usually are, and their occupations and amusements made the halls of Westwell resound with revelry; but in this exuberant mirth the three personages we have named were not really partakers. Laura was thoughtful, she knew not why; she wished she had never come to Westwell—at Astol she was cheerful and composed, and she believed happy; she was quite willing to become the bride of Evelyn; the

union was desired by might believe Evelyn, it relatively blest. Her early of Walter Rayland had conceived was friendship dream, but no more, and well,—but now to be in the improvement that had residence abroad had given fashion, and an ease in him much above a gentle eighteen, Evelyn could scarce who, however amiable he ever talented, could scarce opinion of Laura, when equally talented and spirited manly appearance and de unhappily opposed to the Evelyn, without the remembrance possession to aid his cause. attained his twenty-fifth year Laura knew of the world, she

to convince her she was beloved by him,—that his former affection was not diminished. There were various signs and tokens to betray the feelings of true love, which were perceptible to Laura, though she was aware at the same time that, knowing she was engaged, it was Walter's intention to conceal them from her. Nor was Laura the only person who had detected his secret: Sir Edward Meredith more than suspected the feelings of his friend, and it caused him infinite surprise that Laura, having previously known Walter, should give the preference to Evelyn. In his opinion there could be no comparison,—the cheerful, high-spirited, handsome and manly Walter, and the pensive, thoughtful, and as Sir Edward thought him, puny and melancholy Evelyn. There was no accounting for woman's taste or feelings; but Sir Edward, though Evelyn was his son, would decidedly have given the preference to the open-hearted Walter that he first knew at Naples; there was a difference certainly now, but still there was no comparison.

learned to appreciate the
his son, yet still there
which he could not wholly
presence former days we
upon his memory ; and
admired Laura, loved he
rence Stanley, and even fo
not the connexion ; he
against his judgment o
considered it vain to oppo
of William Penruddock ar
there was a fate in it, to t

And poor Walter, how
Walter endeavoured, and
succeeded in his deter
like a hero ; though he l

he was not born to be a despairing lover, or to pine and waste his days in "yellow melancholy." No, he would just stay and eat the wedding breakfast, pay his compliments to the happy pair, see them depart, and then depart himself in a contrary direction, and endeavour to fall desperately in love with some other fair one; and if he could not succeed, why no doubt he should be gay and merry without, and he would forget his "Romance of the Forest." There were times and seasons, though, when Walter could not brave it so highly—when, after having discovered some new beauty in Laura, some fresh trait of amiability, some higher emanation of the mind, he would plunge into the depth of the forest to bewail his fate, and mourn his blighted hopes. On one occasion he had been almost tempted, like Duncan Gray, not to "spak," but to think, "o' loupin' o'er a linn;" fortunately for the benefit of the world at large, there were no linns sufficiently deep in that neighbourhood, or any brake or precipice to

allow this passing thought to be put in execution, and Walter's life was thus preserved for the benefit of himself and posterity.

But though we speak of Walter's love in the light strain, it was no light affair to him, and his daily behaviour was really an effort of heroism.

Meanwhile Laura's visits to Woodend continued, but the sanguine hopes which Evelyn had entertained of his mother's ultimate recovery were gradually weakening; it was evident, even to the inexperienced eye of Laura, that Lady Meredith was not long to be an inhabitant of this world. And when she reflected on her ill health and deep melancholy, she could scarcely wish it otherwise. She knew not the cause of separation between Sir Edward and Lady Meredith, yet being a separation there must be misery, and it was very visible in Lady Meredith: with Sir Edward there was no appearance of sorrow, and this Laura could not understand; she bewildered herself in trying to assign some

use for such apparent heartless conduct, but without success.

One morning, when the invalid seemed considerably worse than on the preceding day, Evelyn intreated her to have medical advice. "No," she replied; "if it were not contrary to nature, and your kind, but mistaken wish for my recovery, you would do more for my repose, dearest Evelyn, if you were to pray for my immediate release, now I am assured that you and my sweet Laura will be happy; I have no greater earthly care, and only one more wish."

"And what is that, my dear mother? Say what is your desire, and if in the power of man, it shall be gratified."

"It is not in your power, my dearest Evelyn—a last interview with your father would be more than even you could effect."

"There can be no difficulty in that; the wish once made known to Sir Edward, he would instantly comply."

Lady Meredith shook her head. Evelyn

continued—"I will
him."

"Oh, no! no!" in
"not you, Evelyn; s
would perhaps hazard
toward you. Oh, no!

"Then," said Laur
Edward? He will insta
it can only be from th
that he does not himsel
he is not aware of your i

The proposal of Lau
wish of Lady Merede
doubt of Sir Edward's c

On the return of Lau
the master of the doma
introduction, she explain
Meredeth. She expect
and alarmed, but she w
wild emotion he betrayed
denial; and it was not ti
on the precarious state of

extreme danger, that he could be induced
ply with the dying request of one whose
est word had once been law to him ; and
e yielded more from the impossibility of
ng the daughter of Florence Stanley, than
any feeling of compassion for the invalid.

no other voice than Laura's would Sir Ed-
have listened, or have given a second mo-
s attention to such a request ; but, strange
ay, though he hated the proposed union, yet
was the only person who had ever obtained
influence over him since the days of Car-
a. The voice of Laura bore a strong resem-
ance to her mother's, and it had a magic effect
on Sir Edward. Often did he wish she was not
he child of William Penruddock. It was vain
o contend with his feelings ; he had too long
nourished hatred against his former friend to be
able to stifle those passions at once, even though
now convinced that that friend was not the villain
he once supposed him, nor could he renew his
affection for Carlina. His irritation had been kept

existed, yet the feelings
blighted and destroyed,
sune them ; it soothed
feelings to have some le
It must not be supposed
tion at finding there wa
either party—for that he
still his happiness had
fond dreams of his you
blow ; but when he look
the voice of his earliest
an interview for her who
of his heart, he could no
was commissioned to a
proposed visit to Woode

A faint smile illum

"Not your last moments, dearest lady," said Laura, who fancied the flush that spread over the face of the invalid was a symptom of returning health—"you will live to bless us all, and you will return to Westwell, where Evelyn and I will——"

"Never alive, Laura; but I hope I shall be carried thither, and I do wish to be spared till you are Evelyn's wife, then I shall have no more to do with this world."

"We must not dwell on such mournful subjects," interrupted Evelyn; "but aid me, my dearest mother, in persuading Laura to fix an early day; then she will see the effect my happiness will have on your health."

Lady Meredith made no immediate reply. After a short pause she resumed the conversation, by inquiring when would be the most convenient time for Sir Edward's visit?

"He desired me to say," replied Laura, "that he would be here at any time or hour you might wish to appoint."

"I would not defer this evening—think you soon as this evening?"

"There is nothing to do; our guests will be at the dinner table;—shall I be present—would it not be better to rest previous to your interview?"

"And do you think I should do this on my mind?—No."

"I will go to my father's room; we will return when you are at your usual hour of repose;—say at eight o'clock, mother?"

"It will be all the same to me; your father is inclined to go;—said she, in a fearful voice, to pass the copse."

"What is that to a foreman?" said she, smiling; "and you, my dear, feared neither hour nor weather?"

"True, Evelyn—there has been no change of weather."

have heeded neither cold nor heat, and the darkest midnight hour has been the most soothing to my feelings, which were then ever dark and mournful; and you, Evelyn, have partaken those feelings. Not so Sir Edward; he has ever fled from the sun to seek consolation in the shade."

"I will answer for him," replied Evelyn, "he dreads the gloom no more than we do; and besides that, there is half a moon."

"And will you," said Laura, "let me be your companion till they return, dear lady?"

"If being my companion the whole day will not depress you too much, my sweet Laura, it will give much comfort to me."

It was so settled, and Evelyn soon after departed, to return with Sir Edward.

The Lord of Westwell was not prepared for so speedy a fulfilment of his promise: nevertheless, he was unwilling to refuse, and it would sooner be over. Appointing Count Bertini and Walter Rayland master and deputy master of

the revels, he accompanied her to Woodend. The drawing in, and the dinner at the cottage. They were nourishing his newly-returned for his father and mother, engrossed by the idea of his loved Carlina—his feelings were to be described; and the local visit to Woodend was a business. The last time he was to receive the party was to receive the party loved and respected;—the idea of Mrs. Aubrey to go and now how should he be so fondly, so devotedly sunk at the thought; it was over, and then he would have petitions; indeed, he did would request a second in mind agitated by these parties. Sir Edward emerged from

moon shone over the little inclosure, but it had not the gay effect of day-light with the bright beams of the sun, spreading life and beauty on every surrounding object. The dim light and the chill of an autumnal evening, with the mournful sighing of the breeze, gave a recluse and almost holy effect to the scene. To Evelyn it was depressing, even while under the influence of hope and happiness—what then must the impression be to the Baronet, who almost shuddered as he thought how much this recess resembled a tomb with its grassy inclosure !

A small relief was given to the sombre appearance of the dwelling, by a light being visible at one of the windows, and passing in succession from one casement to another. The slight bark of the house-dog also gave token of life and inhabitants, and the door was soon opened to admit them.

“Go to your mother, Evelyn, and prepare her to receive me,” said Sir Edward, who felt that he required the preparation he recom-

mended to Lady M immediately return, pale and agitated. the interview would be deferred ; but no, Evelyn was weaker and more so, but she was ready to slowly followed Evelyn invalid, the same room beheld her. The moon dark shrubs, and stream Gothic window, or door purposes, and gave more than the lamp which stood end of the room. Evelyn father beside the couch of the rays fell that passed the Evelyn then retired, leaving to speak or move. He had the chair beside the couch, but no motion from either himself or the that they were aware of the

Edward had repeated the beautiful lines which commence the chapter, as he entered the room, and like the poet's speaker he could only, after what to him appeared a long silence, utter the name of her he sat beside; but whether or not she was the Carlina of his youthful love, the faint light, and her position, did not enable him to ascertain. The silence was painful, and again he repeated 'Carlina.' Low sobs followed; Lady Meredith was unequal to the interview, and her tears and agitation could not be repressed. Sir Edward was now more collected, and in a kind and soothing manner he begged her to be composed, and say what she required of him. It was long before Carlina could find words to express the desire she had so strongly felt once more to see him, and that before she left the world a friendly interview might be allowed her with the only man she had ever loved.

Sir Edward hastily interrupted her—"Had that been the fact, Carlina, we had never been separated, some lives had been spared, and

unheard-of misery prevented. I acquit you more than forgetfulness of him you had to love, and of imprudence—but that imprudence had the effect of dooming many to misery.

Lady Meredith at first seemed unable to answer; at length she found words to say what you once thought as you do, that my thoughtless imprudence had occasioned my woe;—drawn out by these sufferings this impression created in my mind they were mercifully softened by insanity;—now that since my reason has been restored, I feel I have not been the guilty, the erring creature you have considered me. What caused these frightful events, I have vainly endeavoured to discover; but, Edward, I have not long to live—I feel that this throbbing brain will rest at last—and with my dying breath I repeat, that in thought and word I never varied from the love I felt for you—my first—my last—my only love! For William Penruddock I cherished the affection of a sister;—how often did you tell me, before you arrived in England, that your happiness was

not be complete till I knew and loved your brother and sister, for so you ever termed Florence and her husband—and such they were to me.”

Carlina here seemed exhausted; she leaned back on the pillows from which, in the excitement of the moment, she had raised herself. Sir Edward, from a feeling of compassion, took her hand, and intreated she would be calm; but the cold touch of that hand, which had once been ever extended to hers with rapture and devoted fondness, overcame the small remnant of composure still retained by the suffering Carlina; and Sir Edward, really alarmed, brought some water which stood on an adjoining table: he likewise placed the lamp nearer to the couch, and now witnessed the sad alteration of that face which once was so radiant with beauty, and which he had thought surpassing all others. Grief and anguish had produced an effect that age could never have wrought. In a moment all was reversed with Sir Edward—the sunken

cheek—the hollow eye—the sad change in every feature—all spoke conviction to the heart of the husband, that his wife had only been so unfortunate. Had myriads of witnesses been present to attest the truth of what she related, he would not have felt more confidence or more certainty of the fact, that both had been wretched in the same cause. A flow of sensations rushed to his agitated mind—the past was forgotten. Carlina, his own dearly-loved Carlina, so long and sadly changed, was dear to him as she had been in the day of his youthfulness and the fond caresses that he now bestowed on the feeble and fainting being whom he supported in his arms were as sincere and as fervent as those he had lavished on her in the days of his fondest affection.

“ Carlina—dearest Carlina ! ” said he in the tenderest accents, “ be composed, and do not grieve yet be well. I believe—firmly believe that we should speak only what is truth ! We have both been so unfortunate and miserable—but all is over now.”

and we may yet be happy. Speak, dearest Carlina, will you not forgive the doubts, the jealousy which has been so severely punished? Believe me, though my appearance may not confirm my words, I have been most wretched; but I strove in gaiety and dissipation to forget my sorrow; while you, dearest Carlina, sought to make yourself more pure and more prepared for that bliss that in another world must be yours, —and in this, too, my injured love! Say, then, that you will strive to forget the past, and I will not fear for the future?"

"I am happy now, dearest Edward, and when I have been most miserable I ever said, I shall not die so. And when I was wild and had not reason to guide my actions, I at times remembered why I was in that wretched state; and sometimes I have wandered through the night, for all rooms were oppressive, and I felt relief from lying on the long wet grass. I have recalled all the sad events that at other times would destroy my memory; and then I

would look towards Westwell, and pray for more to be united to its master. And I felt would be so; my heart told me this moment would arrive, though years might intervene; and now I have no further wish save to die in your arms."

"No! to live in them, dearest Carlina! and let me, if possible, make some amends for the past! You shall return with me to Westwell, and if you are not able at present to bear the removal, I will remain here till you are; my poor injured Carlina, I will never leave you again!"

As Sir Edward spoke he pressed the exhausted, but happy form of his wife to his bosom, and the first tears that had fallen from the eyes of her husband since their separation now moistened the cheek of Carlina. "Are these tears for me, dearest Edward? Oh, I am too blest, too happy! My feelings of joy are too—too great! I am faint—very faint—dear Edward! but 'tis with—excess of joy—"

As she spoke she threw one arm round the

neck of her husband, as her head reclined on his bosom. Again he pressed her tenderly to his heart—again he spoke words of comfort and love. A slight but convulsive pressure told that she felt the comfort he wished to impart. Again he pressed her to his heart, again he repeated his assurance of the fondest love. But no word nor movement gave sign of consciousness. Sir Edward feared she had fainted, and called for assistance. Evelyn entered the apartment, but their efforts were ineffectual: the joy of Carlina had been too overpowering for her exhausted strength. With that fervent pressure she breathed her last sigh, even as she wished and prayed,—in the arms of her husband.

CHAPTER IX.

Pondering how mortal schemes prove vain,
And mortal hopes expire!

"WHAT could possess that ridiculous old woman to die, just now?" said Miss Wilson, as she stood admiring herself before a Psyche in her young lady's dressing-room, gaily attired in the dress that had been prepared for the wedding. "Is it not abominably provoking, Miss Dixey? and you look so well too—that white silk becomes you amazingly! As the man says in the play 'There would have been plenty of time to have died hereafter,' and not have spoiled our wedding sports; these things will be regularly old-fashioned. I don't know what you mean to do, but I certainly will not wear an antiquity for the marriage of an heiress. It was a most abominable trick of the old woman's!"

"It is provoking enough, indeed," replied Miss Dixey, "if she had only lived another month, all would have been over, and then she might have died with decency. But Lord, poor soul! I dare say she could not help it, she would have lived if she could, no doubt; for my own part I shall never be in a hurry, and I shall be very glad to put off the time when it comes."

"So would every reasonable person," replied Miss Wilson. "But this old woman was not reasonable. Only think how strange, Miss Dixey, only Mrs. Williams, the housekeeper, and Sir Edward's gentleman, knew there was a Lady Meredith; all the establishment thought Sir Edward a widower; and now all at once, and at the time when she was least wanted, up jumps the dead wife, and here are all these fine things to be packed up and get moth-eaten, and worm-eaten, and old-fashioned! Who can possibly wear a thing that has been made six months?"

"Six months!" Miss Wilson, "Do they mean to put the wedding off so long as that?"

"Yes, so Sir Edward's gentleman told me. This dress," said she, as she turned round before the glass, "does fit uncommonly well, and it is a remarkable pretty colour. My young lady told me to choose a quiet silk, and nothing can be more so than this French white,—such a pretty shade of pink. I told Sir Edward's gentleman that he must give me some idea respecting the postponement; or else, says I, how shall I know how to arrange about packing up those things?"

"But the time could make no difference in the packing."

"No, I know that; but he did not mention it, and if I hadn't told him so, he would not have satisfied my curiosity."

"Well, and what did he tell you? But first tell me, do you think they will let us wear a wreath of orange flowers when the real wedding-day comes?"

"I'm almost afraid not, because the young ladies are to wear them themselves. But I'll

wear one in the evening, when we dance in the hall; we shall have a dance before we leave Westwell for that other place. My lady will never notice what I wear on her wedding-day, and it's nobody else's business. I wonder what Mrs. Prim will say?"

"Now I think of it," said Miss Dixey, "I don't think I will wear one, for Mr. Evelyn's gentleman said that if we put on an orange wreath before we were brides, we should never be brides."

"Did he say so?" exclaimed Miss Wilson, "and here I've been standing the last half-hour with one on my head; la child, why did you not tell me so before? I'll take care never to put on another till I go to church myself. One might be disappointed on the road, so the best way would be to carry it in one's hand, and put in on as the parson begins 'Dearly beloved,' as the peeresses put on their coronets at the coronation."

"That would be very droll, I should be

afraid 'twould make the parson laugh. But you have not told me what Sir Edward's gentleman said?"

"Why, first of all, he told me that this lady——"

"But why do you call her old? There are only thirty-six on the coffin."

"Not more! Well, it's all the same. I don't say she looked old; mad people always look old."

"Mad! Was she mad?"

"Yes, to be sure she was. Sir Edward's gentleman said nervous, but he meant to say mad. They don't shut people up in a cottage in a warehouse for being nervous. I'm rather nervous myself. I think I must ring for a glass of wine and a piece of cake, it will do neither of us any harm. We require something to keep up our spirits after such a terrible disappointment. I'm not that the sight of that beautiful dress is enough to make any one grieve. Oh, here is Mr. James. I would thank you, Mr. James, to bring some

wine and cake, and if Mrs. Williams has a few fresh jellies, and some chicken and ham, you can bring them up too. I am sorry to give you this trouble, Mr. James, but these things must be put away, and if we come down stairs for refreshment, we shall scarcely finish by dinner time. And now then, what was I telling you about Sir Edward's gentleman? Oh, Lady Meredith went mad when her son was an infant, and she lived in a cottage with Mr. Meredith, and some other lady, a relation of the family; and Sir Edward went abroad, and it's so long ago that every body forgot there was a Lady Meredith; of course Sir Edward did not like to remind them of it,—and so every body concluded he had no wife. And I'm sure I often wondered why he had not; for my own part, if I were Miss Penruddock, I should prefer the father to the son. I don't know what he is now, since this death, but he used to be so merry and lively, and had a word to say to everybody; and, between ourselves, Miss Dixey,

Mr. Meredith is but a lack-a-claisical sort of a young gentleman."

"And is the exact time fixed for the wedding?"

"Yes, I believe so, and a precious time we shall have of it! Here are the young ladies gone back to the old Manor House; you know they went directly Lady Meredith was dead; Sir Edward and Mr. Meredith, after the funeral, went off to the north, and Mr. Rayland with them—by the bye, I don't know what to make of that young man—and all the rest of the company took their departure when they heard of the strange event, and that the body was to be brought here to remain till placed in the vault."

"But the Count and Countess Bertini remain—will they stay here, Miss Wilson?"

"No, I think Sir Edward Meredith's gentleman said they would go to Bath and Cheltenham, as they wished to see those places before they left England, and a very wise plan. I only

wish they would take me with them. This is a beautiful place when full of company ; but when empty, it must be as bad as any other. I'm glad, though, my lady did not wish my attendance at that old haunted house, where the ghosts walk about all night and all day too !"

" Ghosts !—mercy on us, you don't mean real ghosts ?"

" Why, some people say no ghosts are real, that they are only shadows."

" Ah, but real shadows ?"

" I suppose the shadows are real enough ; however, I'm glad I am not there ; though it's strange enough, because I don't exactly know to whom I belong ; however, I shall look to the Countess for my instructions and my salary."

" Do you think, Miss Wilson, that you shall remain with your young lady after she is married ?"

" Why, I don't know ; if they spend the spring in London, and a few months at some watering-place ; and if, once every two or three years, they visit the continent ; and if my lady

is very liberal ; and if th
of company ; why then,
nage to exist, the rest of
mausion, provided my la
attend prayers !”

“ What objection have

“ Every objection : in
very disagreeable to be cal
a rubber or a quadrille ;
one's clothes to go down on
used to do at Lady Longfa
resolution never to live with
so it all depends on that.”

“ Well, I can't say I hav
that ; but I shall not stay
when she is a farmer's wife
I should have fainted, wh
Prim say Mr. Reuben Barv
Lord help me ! to think I s
live with a farmer's wife ! I
here, I shall stay for the w
then I shall make my curt
farmer !”

"Well, I must say I commend your spirit.—What occasion can a farmer's wife have for a young lady to wait on her? perhaps she might ask you to wait on the poultry-yard."

"My dear Miss Wilson, don't make me quite faint. I must take another glass of wine to keep up my spirits—foh, a poultry-yard!"

"Well, after all," remarked Miss Wilson, as she placed some of the finery in presses, "we have got handsome mourning. Sir Edward has behaved very handsome and genteel to every person in the house; and the sum he has given me will buy mourning twice over, besides what Miss Penruddock gave me: she did not know Sir Edward had been beforehand with her, and it was not my place to tell her, you know, or refuse what she was pleased to give me; and Mr. Meredeth, he sent me a five-pound note to buy gloves. So, altogether, we have done pretty well; for I suppose, Miss Dixey, you have had the same?"

"I have no reason to complain of anything

except being engaged to
who is to be a farmer's

The conversation was
dinner-bell; and the y
were obliged to defer the
day, for, as they very pr
injurious to the health
after dinner, when there
sion.

The information given
pecting the time appoint
was quite correct, which
expiration of six months
funeral; and the constern
mansion of Westwell was ex
of meeting their host in th
were informed, by Count E
of Sir Edward, of whom few
had forgotten, was a corpse
when Sir Edward again enter
be with her remains.

The company, of course,

diately; among the rest Laura and Lucy, accompanied by Walter Rayland and Reuben Barwell, returned to the Manor House. Mr. Penruddock was too enured to sorrow to feel additional grief at the death of Lady Meredeth, though his hopes and expectations were disappointed; he had trusted that the marriage of Evelyn and Laura would produce a reconciliation between Sir Edward and his wife, and their consequent happiness: thus the pang of their misery would have been removed from his mind; but it was not to be, and Mr. Penruddock had long learned to bow with submission to a decree that was unalterable.

To the rest of the family the return of the young ladies gave unfeigned delight. It may be supposed, in a seclusion so extreme as that of Astol, that the absence of two lively females must be severely felt. When the first joy of their arrival was over, and Mrs. Weston had them quietly in her own room again, she poured

forth her complaints of t
had seen them.

"It is only two mont
it appears longer than
was it so to you, my dear

"We had no time to
Lucy; "we were kept in
such a time as you descr
ruddock's marriage—not
and pleasure."

"And it appeared," said
"to have ended in the sam

"Ah, well, my dears,"
"these sad events must
Meredeth had been ill so
was a blessing. We will tal
Poor Margaret gives a terr
companions she met at Wes
made my hair stand on end to
tion of the 'ladies' who wa
'misses,' as she calls them.
Margaret, I should have thoug

My dear Lucy, what will you do with that fine madam at the Grange?"

"I shall take especial care, when I am mistress of the Grange, that Miss Dixey never enters it as my attendant: it was all very well at Westwell Park, and no one could interfere with the Countess Bertini's arrangements; but when the weddings are over, I shall make my curtsy to Miss Dixey. Why, do you know, Weston, she had a fresh dress every day, or some alteration in it; what do you think of that?"

"Why, my dear, I'm very glad you did not bring her here; that's all I think about it;—but I was quite glad to see Mr. Rayland again. I wish Mr. Penruddock had asked him to stay; it would have enlivened you a little, my dears, and kept up your spirits."

"He told us," said Lucy, "as he came along, that he intended to remain with Sir Edward till after the funeral, and then accompany him and Mr. Meredith into Northumberland; and when the mourning is over, they will return to West-

well; and after he has performed the duty of attending his friend to church, he intends to travel for several years."

And now the inhabitants of Astol, after the first week, quietly resumed their usual occupations and amusements; but with this difference—there was less cheerfulness in Laura and Lucy, and, consequently, in the rest of the family; it was from them that the tone of the domestic life was adopted. With Mr. Penruddock there was little difference; all was the same to him—an unceasing scene of resigned submission. There was another reason, too, for their being less animated—the absence of Evelyn, who for the last three years had been their companion, naturally caused a void in their amusements and occupations; and Reuben Barwell's presence was necessary to superintend the arrangements of his father and mother at Maple Hatch: consequently, there was a gloom and depression about the Manor House, which Laura had never witnessed in it before; but she was not aware

how much of this might be attributed to her own feelings. She was not happy, nor could she give a reason for being otherwise. Lucy was the same; but she acknowledged that the delay of the marriage ceremony, and the absence of Reuben, had something to do with her want of spirits; but this was not the case with Laura, nor could she define her feelings;—she had a very sincere affection for Evelyn; she loved him dearly, she prayed for his happiness, and she tried every effort to dispel the rising wish, that some other person had been selected to share it with him.

CHAPTER

The moon-beam dances o
Come to the coral caves
The music of the Triton
Shall sound the notes yo
And sea-maids, warbling
Shall sweetest welcome g

THE journey of Sir Edward Rayland was sufficiently m his own peculiar trouble ; three, Walter Rayland's wa he had no hope to cheer when the first shock was ov of never again, in this world he had once so fondly lov better it should be so, as that had been deadened & never be renewed. The poe timent when he says,

" Violets plucked, the swe
Will ne'er make grow a

It was so with Sir Edward: his floweret of happiness had been rudely severed from the parent stem; it could never bloom again.

Evelyn had lost the mother so long sought, so lately found—the mother who seemed to have lived only in the hope of seeing him restored to his inheritance; but he knew that life had for years been a burden to her, and though he mourned her loss, and felt the sincerest grief, he would not have recalled her to a state of suffering and misery, for with her impaired health and deranged nerves, such life must have been; and, besides, he had the expectation that the hope of the last three years would be accomplished. But poor Walter, he had no hope, no expectation; to him all was a blank; and what added bitterness to his disappointment, he believed that Laura was not indifferent to him: he could not but feel, from many trifling occurrences, visible only to a quick-sighted lover, that the engagement to Evelyn was the only impediment to his success. This idea gave bitterness

to the reflection, that sh
him, and, as a man of h
vour to forget her as soon
he could avoid being pre
but he had promised, an
expected the performance
above all, it was imperativ
suspect his love.

With these feelings, it
the days passed neither
at Merry Wood Dale : o
hour seemed as long as tw
relief, on one gloomy day, t
torrents, and the gentlemen
ing to amuse themselves w
library, to hear a loud ringi
which was an excitement m
a situation : it must be a visi
son could come with so loud
a visiter ; and so it proved.
Bertini entered the library
wife at Bath, he told them

and English friends, and not liking the place, he thought he would take a run over and have a peep at them. "And you have chosen a lucky moment for your arrival," said Sir Edward; "in such gloomy weather as this, every person is doubly welcome, particularly when they come above two hundred miles to visit us."

Sir Edward did really like Count Bertini, and was truly glad to see him. Not so the rest of the party: Evelyn's feelings were of a negative quality; but Walter positively disliked him, and had often reproached himself for such dislike; but he made no effort to conquer his repugnance; and, as far as politeness would allow, he avoided all intercourse with Bertini. This at Westwell Park, among a numerous society, was no great difficulty; but in a remote situation, where they had few neighbours, a mere hunting-box, with a party consisting of only four persons, Walter felt it would be scarcely possible to maintain his reserve. The Count had made no par-

particular advances well; on the contrary, to participate in Warburton's party might preclude but now it was in familiar terms, and a month together at last felt perfectly astonishing. His opinion respecting the quiet, insinuating man that could not fail of a generous disposition, tempted to acknowledge dislike and his present good. Another month passed, and he was gradually recovering, and seemed to acquire a more healthy was not now that exuberance was too violent to be natural. He was happier as every hour took of time which kept him from Lady Launceston, who was still their guest, and on the

of intimacy with all parties, particularly
er. He proved a most delightful compa-
in their solitary situation. Quiet, com-
and rather languid in his habits, he would
in occupied in the library, while Sir Edward
Walter were striving to seek amusement in
field, or some robust exercise, in which
elyn was sometimes their companion; but
the evening, when, tired with their morning's
ercise, they were disposed to be dull or listless,
the Count was then their never-failing resource.
He would relate tales of his country and anec-
dotes of himself which were always entertaining,
always interesting, sometimes deeply harrowing
—as Walter told him, “He was far better than
a book for tired people—they could lounge on a
sofa, and hear a tale delivered with due pathos
and proper emphasis, and all without the trouble
of opening their eyes.”

Another month elapsed, and the party at
Merry Wood Dale were not quite so solitary.
A few of the neighbouring gentlemen were ad-

mitted to dinner; but though their society was enlarged, and though the first pang of sorrow was softened with Evelyn, yet they were equally unwilling to part with the Count, and they seemed to consider his presence as absolutely necessary to their comfort. They sometimes thought of the poor Countess, but it was too long a journey to expect she would join them at that season of the year. However, her frequent letters gave every assurance of her being satisfied with her residence at Bath; and she *did* hope they would manage to live without her till they returned to Westwell, for really it would be impossible for one born and bred in a southern clime to venture where the snow, as she heard, was six feet deep, and where, as her companions at Bath told her, they were obliged to cut "roads for the carriages to pass along."

At the expiration of another month they began to make preparation for their return to Westwell, where Sir Edward and Evelyn intended passing the period previous to the wed-

ding. About this time Walter received letters from his family, informing him of their return to Rayland Castle, and expressing a wish that he would spend a few days with them. They were aware of his engagements at Westwell, and believing, from his intimacy at Astol, that all was proceeding according to Walter's wish, they would not interfere with his arrangements; but as Rayland Castle was not far out of the way on their return to Westwell, the elder Mr. Rayland wished Walter and his companions to make it a resting-place. This Sir Edward and Evelyn declined, promising to accept the invitation the next year; but the Count agreed to accompany Walter to his paternal home.

The journey of the Count and Walter was speedily accomplished, and they were warmly greeted at Rayland Castle. When first the elder Mr. Rayland learned the destruction of his son's hopes with the heiress of Astol, he, with the rest of the family, grieved for Walter's disappointment; but when they heard he had pro-

mised to attend the wedding, and partake of the festivities, they concluded that their sympathy was unnecessary, and that Walter's passion was a mere boy's love. Under this impression he often inflicted severe pangs on Walter, by jeering at him respecting his lost beauty, and our hero bore it with the firmness of a martyr.

"It is almost to be lamented," said the old man to him once when they were returning from the morning's sport, "that your family were not more correct in their idea of your being enamoured of the pretty heiress."

"It is certainly not to be lamented on my part," replied Walter: "the woes of disappointment and unsuccessful love are not to be coveted; and we may believe all that poets have said of love on the occasion."

"If unsuccessful; but love is not always successful."

"My joking relations," said Walter, with an air of pique which he vainly endeavoured to subdue, "have lost no opportunity of making you acquainted that mine failed of success."

I would not be impertinent nor intrusive, Rayland; but really you astonish me by your declaration:—is it possible that you have been rejected by Miss Penruddock?"

"Very possible—more than possible—I have had a complete rejection. It is neither soothing my vanity nor self-esteem to dwell long on this subject; I would fain forget all relating to this affair, if my friends would permit me."

The Count remained silent, and Walter was not disposed to converse when his feelings were agitated with the recollection of his lost hopes and wishes; but Bertini's attention was so soothing, so expressive of sympathy and friendship, that Walter could not resist the desire expressed more by the manner than the words of his companion, and he at length spoke unreservedly on the subject.

"This account surprises me much," at length observed the Count; "you repeat this as fact, and I must not dispute it; but from my perception of what is and what is not, I should never

have come to the conclusion that such has the case."

"It is nothing uncommon," said Walter, with an attempt at a laugh, "for young men to be presumptuous, or to receive mortification for such presumption."

"Where there is equality there can be no presumption."

"The heiress of ten thousand a year may expect more than a gentleman of inferior rank. The Baronet ranks before the Esquire, in consequence of the superior wealth. The West India estates would more than treble such a fortune as this, which I once thought amply sufficient for any reasonable man."

Bertini made no immediate reply; he appeared thoughtful and abstracted, as he attempted some remark relative to the surrounding scenery, that received no answer; and after he had almost turned his reflections into a soliloquy, when the Count suddenly exclaimed, "I should never have suspected it!"

"Suspected what?"

"That you should fail in a contest with that dreaming boy."

Walter coloured as he answered, "Contest! I had no idea of contesting;—the young lady decided—there could be no disputing the decision."

"Certainly not; but are you convinced of this being her act and deed?"

"It is quite certain that I have been refused, and Mr. Meredith accepted; it is useless to speak further on the subject."

"Poor thing!" ejaculated the Count; "I pity her."

"Pity who—Miss Penruddock?"

"Yes—Miss Penruddock; it is quite evident to one unconcerned that her heart is not in this engagement."

"Good heaven, Count Bertini! what do you mean?"

"That Miss Penruddock has more affection for the rejected than the accepted lover."

" Oh, you are mistaken on his daughter, and her to the misery of such you are wrong."

" I should hope so, too a friendship for you ; but not only you, but the lady the same cause, I cannot might intervene to prevent in the North, I believe only unhappy person, so your feelings ; but since I mate, I have learned to know sincerely grieve that two are doomed to misery."

" Count Bertini, you know your words have caused ; but trust, you are mistaken."

The Count shook his head and ceased.

" I fancied I was resigned to the happiness of Laura and

a sufficient balm for any sorrow I might endure ; but if Laura's peace be not secured, why should mine be wrecked ? Evelyn is more fortunate—he will be exempt from our wretchedness."

" Do not deceive yourself. Will his be an enviable fate, when he finds out too late that the wife he fondly loves has no affection to give in return,—that her heart has been bestowed on another ?"

" He will never know that. If Laura gives him her hand, her affection will follow."

" But the idea, the knowledge that those affections were not his, that she had to learn to love him ! Poor Evelyn ! if I speak my sentiments, he, with his sensitive and morbid feelings, is more to be pitied than either."

The conversation ended here, but the contending and conflicting ideas caused by the insinuations of the Count were not to be silenced in the mind of Walter. The Count might be right, and to a romantic sense of generosity their future comfort would be sacrificed. This reflection

haunted him; and the probability that Laura's fate would, like her mother's, be an unhappy one, was too much for him to bear with composure. Now instead of avoiding the conversation when alone with Bertini, he rather sought to enter on it; but the Count drew back and appeared to shun the subject. This had the effect that was, perhaps, intended, for the irritation of Walter's mind not being allowed to expend itself in complaint, like some pent-up stream, disdained all bounds, and he bitterly lamented his fate, and repeatedly regretted that Evelyn had ever been introduced at Astol. Better he had remained in his gipsy state, than destroy the happiness of two who, if he might believe Bertini, were devotedly attached to each other.

Walter was not sorry when the time arrived for their return to Westwell: they were all too merry, too gay at Rayland Castle; it was too great an exertion to be able to support the deception, and assume those spirits which at pre-

sent were not natural to him; and though the alternative was dreadful, yet as there was no hope of the marriage being prevented, the sooner it took place the better, and so far from delaying the ceremony, had it been in Walter's power he would have hastened the appointed period. With these feelings, which, with the heroism of a martyr, he successfully disguised from all but the Count, he commenced his journey with Bertini. As they passed through the park the Count admired the fine old trees and romantic ruins of the ancient castle, which stood within half a mile of the present building, a comfortable, substantial mansion, fit for a country gentleman, and having no pretension to be called a castle; but the title was continued from courtesy, and out of compliment to the ruins which had been a fine baronial residence, and came by marriage to the Rayland family: it was capable of more improvement than the rent-roll of the elder Mr. Rayland would allow; and the prospect of Walter's marriage with an heiress

was hailed with much delight by his that was now all over, and Walter's father regretted the circumstance to the Countess wished the lady had been propitious; but at the same time adding, that his son would be more than enough for comfort and stability, in the station to which he was bound. Perhaps a wealthy union might only increase his cares.

The travellers arrived without interruption at Westwell, and, to their surprise, they found Edward and Evelyn were detained in the city. The Lady Bertini, however, was there to meet them, and expressed much pleasure at the return of the Count. It was, as she said, very solitary to be alone in so large a house, especially as she had never known it without a number of guests. And now Walter had sufficient opportunity to become as well acquainted with the Countess as he had lately been with the husband; but the intimacy did not give him equal pleasure—there was a degree of apparent mel-

or peevishness which left no favourable impression, and Walter hastily concluded that she was an unamiable wife to her fascinating husband.

The courage with which Walter, when he left Rayland Castle, contemplated the destruction of his hopes and wishes was, like that of Acres, fast "oozing away;" he began to tremble at the idea of meeting Laura, and, like some bodily cowards, he could bear the contemplation of what he dreaded no longer. He would ride over to Astol, and end at once the fear of the first interview. Accordingly, the next morning he mounted his horse and proceeded to the Manor House.

Walter was received with hospitality by the inhabitants of the Manor House, but the jocund glee with which the young maidens once welcomed him was no longer visible. There was sufficient cause for such want of hilarity in his once gay companions—but it was not pleasant—a feeling of restraint crept over all the party, and

when Laura proposed a walk in her flower-den, it was a relief to each person : for some they sauntered in company, but at last W found himself alone with the young mistress of the domain, and then the intercourse became even more formal and constrained.

At this early season of the year there was little to tempt in the parterre : snowdrops, crocuses, and hepaticas, with some other spring flowers, were in abundance, but they made a small proportion of a lady's garden ; however the day was fine, and the sun gave more heat than usual ; it was more like a May-day than one in February. Laura, by way of saying something to the gentleman seemed determined to woo the silent deity, spoke about the warmth of the weather, adding " You have never seen A Mr. Rayland, in the summer : it was autumn last year when you came to Westwell, when you first visited the forest it was autumn—you have not forgotten your g camp ? "

Walter was in a humour to "confound" the gipsy camp, but out of respect for the female he was addressing—habitual respect—it was not only with Laura, he would have restrained himself with every female,—he merely said, but he said it with bitterness, "Would it were possible to forget such folly!—would it had never been conceived!—it has marked my future life for misery."

Laura looked at him with surprise as she answered, "I am sure then we ought all to lament it—but yet how dreadful might have been the consequence to us!—you will not always, I hope, have cause to regret it."

The kind, the gentle accents of Laura overcame the prudence of Walter, and he said hastily, "If it had not been for that unfortunate night, Mr. Meredeth would never have been introduced to Mr. Penruddock."

"And why should that make you miserable?"

"Why? because it has destroyed my hopes, my desires, my expectations—I know I had no

right to expect ; but I
and I thought your father
on account of your youth
of your age,—and I, I
dream of hope that is to

“ Mr. Rayland, I n
'twere vain to pretend
but remember, I must
the wife of another,—
friend.”

“ Forgive me, Laura
what I did,—forgive and
am sure, believe me what
I would not act ungen
Evelyn—my own mad f
this confession—I will ne

And it was firmly the
conquer his unfortunate
was also determined nev
engagement made for he
she believed she did love
that their engagement r

was the love of a sister ; and before she returned with Walter to the house, though both had kept their intention, yet each had betrayed the secret that both endeavoured to conceal. Walter was certain he was beloved, and Laura could not doubt the words, the looks of Walter ; from that day they avoided meeting, and Walter refrained from visiting the Manor House unless accompanied by Evelyn.

In consequence of the death of Lady Meredith the arrangements for the ceremony were altered, and the wedding was now to take place at Astol instead of Westwell,—“ a much better arrangement,” as Mrs. Weston said, “ for whoever heard before of a bride going to the bridegroom’s house to be married ? ”

Walter Rayland had full time to feel the misery of his disappointment, his only companions being the Count and Countess Bertini ; Sir Edward and Mr. Meredith were detained in the North, and did not expect to leave till a fortnight before the day appointed for the wed-

ding. The favourable opinion Walter formed of the Count was daily strengthened and in proportion he felt an increasing dislike to the Countess, whom he considered to be a discontented and repining woman.

In the character of an unsuccessful lover it was natural that Walter should seek solitude; or rather he did not slight it when it came in his way, for he usually made the inquiry at breakfast of the Count respecting his movements for the morning, and if Bertini seemed inclined for a companion, Walter was always ready to second his views. But the Count at this period very frequently had letters to answer relative to some estates in Italy, which occupied much of his time. Walter occasionally, and as a matter of complaisance, would endeavour to make himself agreeable to the Countess when he sometimes met her in the terrace-room; but if his politeness gave pleasure to the Countess, she was unfortunate in her method of showing it, as she appeared constrained and uneasy, as if burthened

with care, or disliking her companion, and Walter generally took the first opportunity of satisfying himself that he had done his duty in making the attempt to be sociable.

One morning, the weather proving remarkably fine, Walter proposed walking in the forest, laughing, as he said he had a peculiar fancy for primroses and violets, and the first plant of either kind in its wild state always gave him a sensation of pleasure not to be described.

The Count ridiculed his juvenile propensity, and wished him success in the pursuit of those humble flowers, at the same time telling him of a sequestered dell in the heart of the forest, where they abounded; and he regretted that he could not be his companion, as he had papers of importance to examine which would occupy the whole morning. Walter left the house and was proceeding across the park, but he proved inconstant to his boyish fancy; for the sea, on the other hand, was so temptingly inviting, the sun sparkled so brightly on the dancing waves, that

it dispelled the sentimental whim for
and primroses, and with exhilarated spirit
walked down to the beach, which was
five miles from the hall. Walter was a
lover of nature : he could admire the grand
well as the lowly, and his taste for the sublime
did not interfere with his admiration for the
magnificent; there was a tremendous swell
the sea, the waves dashed on the shore with
violence not often known in that part of
country; he stood for some time absorbed in
that strange and dreaming contemplation which
the sea always causes in some minds : how
he remained in this state of abstraction was
certain, and it is also uncertain how long
would have remained, for he was interrupted
a voice behind him saying, " A rough sea
day, Sir, and the wind's increasing, there'll
a squall ere long."

" I suppose so," replied Walter, " for I
the vessels making towards shelter."

" They are right to do that," said the man

"for it may or may not be a stormy night; I don't much think it will though; there'll be a rough squall, and it will subside before night; that's my opinion, master."

"And that vessel out there seems to be of your opinion, my friend."

"I take it that she is waiting for that boat out yonder."

"I've been watching that boat," said Walter, "some time; they appear to be trying to land, and the surf drives them back."

"They've got in the wrong place, Sir; they are up too high, fools as they are; a quarter of a mile this way there's a good landing place."

"It would be charity, my friend, to tell them so, and not let the surf beat their boat to pieces. Sailors are like freemasons—make them a sign they'll understand, if you dislike the trouble of going to them."

"And what the devil should I do that for, and be d——d to them? what do they come here for, to take the bread out of our mouths?"

"Crew, and be d——
set of foreigners, come
when he wants to get
way."

"Do you mean to say
vessel? I would not re
turn informer; but it
ritable to set the officer
them get swamped in the

"And so raise a horn
Not such a d——d fool

"Two of a trade," t
surely, my friend, you
drowned? If you won
can land, I must go an
cannot."

"Spare your trouble
to land somehow—you

"Do you mean the free trade, when you speak of 'honest men?'"

"To be sure, Sir. What trade can be more honest? We takes our boat—runs over to France or Holland, as it may be—buys the things as they are sold at the fair market price—then we sell them again in England at a reasonable profit,—and if that is not an honest and fair trade, I don't know what is."

When Walter had seen the sailors effect their landing, he seated himself on the shingles, intending to resume the contemplation of that scene which for him had always interest; but his companion, perhaps encouraged by the frank manner of Walter, seemed disposed to be sociable, and throwing himself at his length on the beach, which sloped down to the water, he very leisurely pulled out an immense flat box, and taking an enormous portion of the contents, he deposited it in his mouth, then offered the box to Walter, saying, "I s'pose you don't take 'baccy, Sir?"

"Thank you, my friend, no, it is not on my comforts."

"It is mine though; and how should I be able to take it if it were not for the free trade? My earnings as a fisherman would not allow half I require, and to keep my missus and children too, as they ought to be kept."

"I thought the persons to whom you belonged were particularly cautious respecting intercourse with a stranger: how do you know but I might be a revenue officer?"

"God bless you, Sir, I know you well enough; you are a visiter at the Hall. I often goes up there to the young ladies; and I know something of you, besides that."

"Young ladies!—there are no young ladies there now; you do not mean the ladies Astol?"

"I mean the ladies in the housekeeper's room; much finer ladies than the ladies I have seen walking with you, Sir; and good friends they are to the free trade. They are prepar-

for a wedding they tell me; you would be amazed to think the number of things they buy, the foreign ladies particularly."

"The foreign ladies?"

"Yes, belonging to the lady Countess, whose husband comes down here every day; and he looks out to sea so anxiously, that if he did not belong to the Hall, I should take him to be one of the free trade himself."

"He often has communications from abroad; but you must be mistaken in his person, he cannot come down here often himself, he is generally occupied all the morning in the house; it must be one of his attendants you see."

"Oh, no, I know the Count; I have often spoken to him;—he is not like you, Sir; he comes down here and asks me questions about the weather, and the wind, and what vessels have come in; not as you have been speaking to me this morning, but as if I were a slave. Confound his pride; I hate those proud people, who look on all below them as if they were dogs.

does to talk to gentle
properly to me—not a
shilling for you.' D—
have given him one. I
up the dirty thing. I
speaks pleasant to me, a
flesh and blood, why, I
—and as you are a gentl
are, at the Hall, Sir—but
there; you behave like
be as you should ever tl
county, why mayhap I c
or two. I've got one o
likes to try, and will tak
to yonder village, and inq
then you shall have my s

Walter laughed most
and the man joined in his

to you—but there is no prospect for some years now.”

“ No, Sir, or I should not have been so ready with my offer. I should have thought your civility was only put on either to help yourself or your friend, mayhap; but now ’lection is just over, you can have no motive for that, for they never keep their politeness after the chairing. I gave my vote to please my missus;—the member palavered her over, and shook hands with her quite friendly like. She’s not young enough for him to kiss—and she, like an old fool, was quite taken like, when he praised her house, and said he would bring his wife and daughters to look at her pretty garden; and she was fool enough to expect the ladies would be hail-fellow-well-met with her. No, no, Bet, said I, you’ll see; but you shall have your way this time, provided you’ll let me have mine ever after, if this don’t turn out as you think it will.”

“ And how did it turn out ? ”

“ Why, he passed her in the street, and didn’t

know her, for
to the very
been such an

"I ought
Walter, "as
you reckon
that."

"No, we
head about a
afraid there's
man to speak
the man, it

“ You’ll see, Sir, he’ll cut across that field, and come down by that broken boat, near where those sailors have landed, where they are now. You may be sure it is the Count ; see how he struts : he walks as if the ground was not good enough for him, and he swings his arms as if he intended knocking one down. I wonder you don’t know his walk ! ”

“ Why, I never had time to study it,” said Walter, laughing ; “ he is not much of a walker, and he never offered me a shilling, as he did you, to make me remember it ; and it is of no sort of consequence if it is him or not—it is as natural for him to take a walk down to the beach as for us.”

“ True, Sir ; but you seemed to doubt his having been down here every day.”

The conversation here had a pause ; the fisherman again pulled out his tobacco-box, and Walter, though to the sailor he had made light of the Count’s walks to the beach, did consider it singular that Bertini should speak so much of

papers, and give him the idea that he has time even for exercise. Some persons, by the appearance of being occupied, and so minutely; and Walter, having so settled his mind on thinking of returning to the Hall, was surprised to see a fisherman, or smuggler rather, suddenly appeared, "Why, d——n it, the Count has come down to the shore was to look after that boat; see, the men are all flocking round him; what the devil are they going to do? Why, that fellow seems to know the coast well; see how he is directing them to the very place I pointed out to you, Sir! Ah, they've got her right; the Count's his Countship is going in—What, is he going to take himself off, I wonder?—a proud fellow! 'There's a shilling for you,'—as if I would take a shilling from him, and be d——d to do so!"

"You have formed an unfortunate and mistaken true opinion of the Count, for he is very kind and gentlemanly."

"He don't show it to poor folks, then," said Walter, who did not like the tone of the

conversation when he mentioned the Count ; but it was useless to attempt altering his opinion, it was so totally immaterial to the person concerned—but Walter did not immediately pursue his intention of departing ; his curiosity was excited to see whether the Count was, as the man said, about to proceed to the vessel in the distance ;—the boat rowed swiftly, and the Count went on board. After remaining about half an hour, Walter began to tire, when he saw the boat again put from the vessel and row to land ; the Count spoke to the seamen, and then walked hastily the way back to the Hall. At first Walter thought of following him, but then recollecting how tiresome it is to have one's thoughts interrupted when occupied by business, he gave up the intention ; and soon after wishing the sailor good morning, he rose to leave the beach.

“ Good morning, Sir ; and if you should ever want any articles in the way of free trade, or in the way of ’lection, I shall be happy to serve you

in either. T
as he put up
go the contrai
man; he can
not stare as i
worse, by spea

When Walt
all in a bustle.
had arrived un
hurrying backw
boxes, &c. W
the Count and
and his father i
must, as the sea
the public, or h
before him on t
was no opportu
been so inclined;
his mind in the
and perhaps wou
to his memory i
Edward had not

the morning, and inquired of his guests where they had been. To the surprise of Walter, the Count asserted that he had been occupied the whole of the morning looking over some papers.

Walter was astonished, but made no remark; whatever the Count's intercourse with the sailors might be, it was clearly not to be communicated; but after a short time it passed from his mind, while the presence of Evelyn Meredith recalled what he would most willingly have forgotten; but mention was so frequently made of Astol, and the preparation, that it was a sort of mental torture to our poor hero; even in his own opinion, however, he bore it well; but it was a relief to his feelings when Sir Edward complained of fatigue, and proposed to retire, adding, "I would advise you, Evelyn, to do the same, as you wish to visit the Manor House so early in the morning."

When they left the room the remainder of the party drew nearer the fire, and for a short space of time the conversation was kept up between



persons consider an anor
ever, she was conversabl
found her much pleasa
than he had ever before
sorry when her husband
and advised her to retire

CHAPTER XI.

We wither from our youth, we gasp away,—
Sick,—sick ; unfound the bourne,—unslaked the thirst ;
Though to the last, in verge of our decay
Some phantom lures, such as we sought at first ;
But all too late.—So are we doubly curst.

WHEN the Countess, in pursuance of the advice, or rather command, of her husband, had left the apartment, the Count said, " Perhaps, Mr. Rayland, you would like to follow the example of our companions ?"

Walter had no desire to woo his own meditations, they were of no pleasing kind, and he declared his intention of remaining some time longer, unless, he added, " I am trespassing on your hours of repose ?"

" I seldom sleep before midnight, and there are full two hours to that time. What would the gay people of the world think of such primitive times ?"

fashion-leaders are the
exhausted strength and sy
retirements."

"Still this hour would
them."

"It would; and I sh
lest I frighten sleep away

"To judge by your a
great friend to that same
really look as jaded and
been revelling the last si
a female I should hesi
how ill—no, not ill,—but
worn you are looking a
You tired yourself in you

"Perhaps I did, but
nor am I aware," said
laugh, "that my count

affectionate manner, as he answered, "We are but acquaintances of yesterday, it is true, and my interference may seem impertinent, else I would say how utterly impossible it is not to perceive that some grief, some unknown sorrow, lies heavy at your heart; forgive me if I am intrusive, but my friendship is sincere, and I must lament that one so young, and so capable of something better, should sink under the loss of a girl's affection."

"It is that," replied Walter, hastily, "that explains the appearance you commiserate, but I shame that it should be so visible; however, I must shake off this feeling: but the events of the next month will probably perform this feat without my interference: the ceremony once over, I trust all regret will cease. It must," said he, rising hastily; "no lingering feeling of preference can remain for the wife of another." Walter's momentary agitation subsided, and he resumed his seat, saying, in a subdued voice, "I know not, Count Bertini, how you have

gained possession of
fain hide from the wo
the family of Mr. M
when I assure you it
other person,—the str
when reason and hono

“ Still I must grie
“ that the happiness o
I have heard and read
mistaken idea of gene
bers around them in m
be so in the present ins
should you not think
than prudence in your

“ I must not view it i
forget all feelings of hor

“ But we will just pu
Count, in an insinuatir
boy Evelyn were persue
years ; or suppose, if he
should be obliged to re
bourhood,—this is only

no one could remove him against his will,—but if by any means he were absent, you might proffer your suit and succeed; then the happiness of yourself and the young lady would be insured for life, and the love-sick boy himself would, after a short interval, be the first to thank you."

"You have contrived a very ingenious theory," said Walter smiling, "but not at all practicable."

"It might be practicable; there only requires the resolution, and it is done."

"Done!" exclaimed Walter, "in what way?"

The Count hesitated, and Walter was also silent, but he appeared anxiously expecting the reply of his companion. To say that the Count's words made no impression, would be wrong—Walter felt there might be some truth in his statement, and he did not believe that the attachment of Evelyn would endure through time and change, as his own had done. The possi-

improbable the suppositi
As he made no reply, th
" I have a friend in ill-he
commended to try the se
a long voyage. This frie
whole of last summer in
tempted to visit your
He has been in London
weather now becoming
is intending to return
present his little bark is
and if Evelyn could be
with him, the novelty o
of climate might drive
from his head."

Walter was almost
idea, and he was asto

friendship for him, and as such he would not betray the contempt he felt for the project.

"My dear Count," he replied, "you forget how very unlikely it is that a bridegroom elect should be tempted by any expedition to risk the failure of his prospects, and such prospects too! I agree with you that it is very probable the result might be what you anticipate, but the utter impossibility of the enterprise—Evelyn could never be persuaded."

"He might be forced," interrupted the Count, half serious, half jesting.

"Forced, in these days!" returned Walter, laughing,—“but, to be sure, I was once forced and carried away for Sir Edward Meredeth—but that was in Italy; these things could not be done in England. Why, in the first place, you cannot go ten steps without meeting sailors or country people; and even if you were to succeed in getting him on board the vessel—”

"Once on board, care might be taken to prevent any return."

resignation—but I would
it by an act that would
future happiness—that w
esteem."

Walter, as he spoke
which, for the moment, h
made him condemn the
devise so base an act ;
surprised at the propos
at the quiet manner in
to his ebullition of ange

" My dear Mr. Rayl
could imagine me in e
surmising a case, and y
a proposal. I had no i
in exercising a flight c
Evelyn, indeed, he mi

displeasure." This was said in a tone of such apparent innocence and candour, that Walter, judging by his own disposition, gave him full credit for his disavowal of any sinister intention; and judging by the frankness of his own heart, he believed the Count to be merely indulging in a dream of fancy, and which he had neither the expectation nor the desire of putting in execution. The Count assumed an air of offended dignity, which completely imposed on Walter, who apologized for his warmth of speech and manner, and retired to rest with a painful conviction of having injured the Count by his momentary surmise.

Walter's favourable opinion of Bertini's character was strengthened when, the next day at dinner, he spoke of the vessel at anchor near the beach as being the one belonging to his friend. Sir Edward proposed sending an invitation, but this the Count declined; his friend was in ill health, and could neither bear society nor fatigue.

It is an old and a very true remark, that time

hate, but yet wish over. hero. The wedding that few days was viewed by as the day of execution to as the period drew near between the families of V came more frequent, troubles increased. He tude of a martyr, and h Laura did not participate

The society of Westwe arrival of Philip Deverel the settlements—this wa ter. "Well, it would soc riage, like death, was un there would be an exti fear."

been delayed — another interruption might as unexpectedly intervene. Walter, to his dismay, found he had, unknown even to himself, admitted such ideas; but the parchments and documents that Deverel was so careful about struck a chill to the heart of the lover, as the death-warrant to the felon;—and he was to witness—to sign the deed that would put a final bar between himself and the dream of his last years;—and to add to his vexation, he had also to listen to the reproaches of his legal friend.

“ By my hope of greatness, Walter,” said Philip, as they were taking a morning’s ramble, “ the more I see of my new patron and client, the more I wonder how you let the prize slip through your fingers—why the Astol estates make but a small part of her revenue; you might have built up your old castle yonder with the brushwood. I am going over to the Manor House in the course of the day; come with me, and I will point out all the beauties that might have called you master.”

moment ; but, however, y
this ride, because the br
my companion, and my
before him."

"Then I will stroll wi
the 'Keeper's Luck,' fo
name of the spot where w
of ourselves."

"Speak for yourself, S
a man of me. I leave t
chose to claim it ; I can
bough of an old oak—I
wedding favours hanging

"Let my wedding res
Evelyn."

"If you do not marry
never forgive you—but n

then he strolled on to the "Keeper's Luck," moralizing on the strange events that had followed their forest freak—that whim of the hour. He was not so sentimental or romantic as to suppose his happiness was gone for ever; but for some months, possibly years, he should feel the disappointment. He threw himself under one of the largest trees, and time passed unheeded, till a rough voice accosted him with "Good morrow, Sir!"

"The same to you, my friend; but you startled me!"

"Why, I guess, Sir, you thought a seaman would have no business in the woods; we han't much, indeed; I never come in the forest willingly; for my part, I can't see the use of land, but for ships to stop at; sea-ports are wanted; but what would it signify if all the inland cities in the world were out of the world?—they're no use, you see, Sir."

"They would tell you a different story."

"I don't see how they could."

They might have
by the sea, Sir; but no
nun; now, there's Sout
we have to sell, so that's

"And what has bro
now, as you dislike it so

"Why, do you reme
off the block-stone, whe
the boat to land?"

"Perfectly well."

"Well, then, she t
trader, after all; so you
that, why there was no
like; so when the men
I made myself agreeal
same to me; but some
men, they were foreigne
their craft, and a pretty

“ Oh, yes, Sir ; but I was going to tell you ; one of those sailors that we saw blundering in the wrong place, hurt his leg on a piece of rock, and he was obliged to come on shore to be doctored ; and as luck would have it, my missus has a room that we don't use, and the man wanted a tidy lodging, for he is above the common men ; so my missus let him have ours, and he was willing to pay handsomely for it ; and so he did beforehand, and that pleased my missus, and she nursed him well, and that pleased him, so all went well you see, Sir.”

“ Quite so for you ; but what has this to do with your walk, so very far from the shore ?”

“ You will hear, Sir, have patience ; and my missus made him all manner of nice things, and the man soon got well. ‘ He could not help it,’ he said, and that pleased my missus again ; and then he got well enough to join his mates ; and before he went, he asked me to go on board his vessel : so I went, and my missus with me, that she might dress his leg for the last time ; for

cabin was fitted up very
rest. I never saw a cabin
same manner ; all sorts
said ; though, for my part
fort in them :—there we
could not sit in, they were
and then down you sunk
not half so comfortable as
you can sit snug and let
nose ; now that's what I
to my missus, when she
dering at all the fine things

“ I suppose this was the

“ Devil a bit ; the cabin
comfortable room, like a cabin
gimcracks.”

“ The Count Bertini

that either: there was no sick person but my missus's chap; and now, Sir, I come to the part that brought me into this wilderness, where a man can neither see nor hear; and the long and the short of my story is, that this cabin is prepared for you, Sir."

"For me?—what an idea!"

"Well, I'm glad it makes you laugh; for I thought you looked very sorrowful just now, Sir; but, however, this cabin is for you."

"It is very kind of them, then, to take so much trouble for me."

"Kind, do you call it?—then I've been a d——d fool to come so far to warn you not to walk out alone, or go near the water, without a good heart of oak with you; and now you call it kind!"

"Surely, when they take so much trouble for my pleasure and convenience."

"Well then, Sir, good day to you; and when you are carried to another country against your will, don't blame Dick Roberts, that's all, Sir, and remember I warned you."

ungrateful, even for what
now called after the sailor
appease the pique which
his information had cre-
effected, the smuggler re-
ground, and in answer to
he proceeded to inform hi
gress of his or his missu
Walter determined to lenc
drive other feelings that
from him.

“ I did not much att
missus said to the sick sa
was : they had a long
asked a great many no
thought so then, and so I
of that ; but that's neithe

the great talker, your honour; 'Bet,' says I, 'have you left your sweetheart behind you? I shan't let you nurse wounded seamen again.'—Then Bet called me an old fool, and said she was very unhappy; so then I began to feel queer again. Bet's a likely woman, your honour, though she's past fifty; but she soon set me at rest, and the long and the short of my story is, that when Griffiths was ill in my spare room, he was one night light-headed, and he raved about a young lad that he said they came to fetch in that sloop, and he spoke of carrying him away by force, and once or twice he spoke of the Hall; and my missus forgot all this, because she thought he was raving and out of his senses with fever; but when she went on board, and saw the cabin, and heard a few odd sentences from the seamen who spoke English,—Bet's a capital hand for putting two and two together,—why then she began to think the man spoke truth, when he was mad in his illness, and so, Sir, I came away to tell you; but Bet

him all about it.

"It is very kind of you
interest in a stranger."

"My Bet knows you, "

"Indeed! I fear then
return the compliment, b
give my want of memory,
fortunate as to make her :

"Do you remember,
when you and some n
placed tents, and lived i
about here?"

"On this very spot, m

"Was it? Well I did n
place my missus said it
see it. Perhaps you d
young man who was cau
a hare that he picked u

gentlemen, but my Bet says, you in particular, listened to the silly lad, who is Bet's brother, young enough to be her son, though my missus always brought him up with her own children. Well, this lad would have been transported if you gentlemen had not begged him off and bribed the gamekeeper ; he knew when he was on the right side of the hedge.—So Tom got off and went to sea, and became an honest man, Sir.—My missus always thanks you for it ; she has got your name, Sir, but I did not know you were the gentleman that saved Tom till we met on the beach, and then I guessed by my missus' description, for she had been at the Hall and knew you well, Sir ; and now I hope your honour will be careful and not put your head in the lion's mouth."

"That you may depend on—I will avoid the lion when I see him."

"There's a trap here, depend on it, Sir,—or why should they want to deceive an old seaman, and make him fancy they employed a yacht in

11

12

that he gave up the trade of poaching, and, as his brother-in-law said, he "took to the honest business of the free-trade like a man."

"So," thought Walter, "I have changed a poacher into a smuggler, and this Dick Roberts thinks I have achieved a great and a good deed ; well, ' chacun à son goût. ' "

CH

Why I can smile,
And cry content to
And wet my cheeks
And frame my face
I can add colours ev

"EVELYN," said Sir
sitting after dinner, "
society this evening,
over some papers w
should understand.
cerning this estate, or

"He knows the best
noble estate, and ——

"I am perfectly sa
ledge," said Evelyn, i
Bertini.

"It is absolutely req
be acquainted with some
your inheritance," return

will accompany Mr. Deverel to the library, by the time you have read, or heard him read some documents, I will join you,—I have ordered wine there."

"Then," said Deverel, "we had better remain where we are; wine is a sworn enemy to title-deeds, settlements, and such sort of work, so I shall take the liberty of sending the red juice away."

"Even as you will, my Lord Chancellor, for such I prophesy you will be."

"And now, Mr. Meredeth," said Philip, when they had placed themselves one on each side the fire, "now you must summon all your patience to listen to what I make my daily pastime. Here is the deed of settlement, by which the young lady's estates are secured to herself and the second son, if you are so happy as to have two, leaving a splendid provision for daughters and younger children; this must be signed, and the blanks filled up, the day before the wedding. And you must listen, at present,

to a long list of names and provisoes, and be attentive as you can."

"I am glad that is all you require; I certainly will attend as much as I can."

And now Evelyn was doomed to hear a marole of law-terms to which he paid no smallest attention; the sound made his ache, but the sense passed unheeded.

"Well," said Sir Edward, as he entered the room, "have you got over the hard work?"

"Mr. Meredith makes light work of dreams over it, for really I do not believe understands above half."

"You would be nearer," said Evelyn, "if you were to say a quarter."

"Well," said Sir Edward, "that will be sufficient, at least I suppose so. But it is imperative that you should understand a clause of your grandfather's will: to prevent any ill consequences from your inattention, I will state the substance of this clause. An alliance was contemplated for me at a very early period

my father, to hasten an event which he and the whole family had much at heart, left me only a life interest in the unentailed part of his property, consisting of the Merry Wood Dale estate, and some land in this county, unless I married before I was of age. My father's ardent desire was not gratified; I had long passed the specified period when he died, and I was even then unmarried.—I did not comply with the condition, consequently these estates are not at my disposal. You will, by your intended union, secure this property for your own whims hereafter, if you are inclined to follow the example of your grandfather, and will them in the same odd manner.

“And suppose I do not marry before the stipulated period?”

“Why then you will never possess the northern property, which, in that case, will revert to your aunt, the Countess Bertini, and her son.”

“Indeed! And are they well provided for?”

the world. Occasionally his timid and gentle Countess would endeavour to soothe, and by her caresses soften the irritation that nearly overpowered him; but he would repulse every attempt with harshness, till, worn out and irritated in turn, Lady Bertini gave way to her tears, and made no further attempt.

“ Fool!—dolt!—idiot, that I was to marry!” said he, after a short pause, which was followed by renewed vehemence. “ Fool that I was, to be taken by a face and form! Had I insisted on these estates being given at once, all had been well; you would have complied, while your father and mother would have been frightened by your tears and weakness to any sacrifice; then, instead of marrying as I have done, I might have had a dower fit for the wife of a nobleman; and you,—you, like an idiot,—sit weeping there, when if you assisted me by working on the weakness of your brother, this might have been avoided. You know he had no affection for this boy, this base——”

"Stop, Rinaldo!" said the Lady, with spirit and energy, which seemed quite in opposition to her usual quiet and reserved manner.—

"Rinaldo, you may go too far! Evelyn is not base-born, you know he is not! You know it was your arts and insinuations that caused all the misery that has embittered the lives of two families: be satisfied with what you have done, nor bring down the vengeance of Heaven on your own head, and on mine also for being connected with you."

"By Heaven, this boy shall not inherit the northern estates! I will prevent it yet. To have all my plans destroyed—to have my son lose his rightful property!"

"You know well, Count Bertini, that Frederic is comfortably and happily settled; he neither wishes nor desires more."

"And because he has a grovelling soul, like his mother, shall I see him robbed? Comfortable!—Pitiful! Has he estates equal to this?—to Westwell?—to Merry Wood?—nay, to

Astol? Has he estates equal to all or any of these? Answer me, Julia."

"He has not; nor is it necessary to his happiness that he should have such wealth, dearest Rinaldo,—my first,—my last,—my only love. Be happy yourself; your son is so, with his wife and children. Why should we not be the same? Let us return to Italy, and forget all these delusive wishes that have marred your peace and ruined mine. Oh, Bertini! if I could only see you in private the same fascinating person you appear to the world! If I did not in solitude mourn the unkindness with which you treat me; if the early love of my youth could be renewed, I would forget, I would pray to forget, all the misery I have known, and we may yet be— Oh, no!" said she, with a burst of grief which impeded her utterance, "we can never be as when we first loved!"

"May I presume to ask why? But you speak truth, Julia—we never can. I can never forget that, when I was first introduced to your family,

meditate. Oh, spare me, Bertini!—spare yourself and children. What wealth can recompense the pangs of an accusing conscience?”

“And may I ask what mighty crime you are pleased to accuse me of meditating?”

“The heaven above us only knows; but you have some project. Your restless nights and incoherent speeches have betrayed you.”

“Betrayed what?”

“Alas! I know not; but I know full well the colouring you gave to the lively spirits of poor Carlina; and well do I know all that followed. You have been gay—you have appeared happy, Rinaldo, while I have been accused of pride, reserve, and ill temper, because I could not conceal an aching heart.”

“You can give scope to a prating tongue. Once for all, will you exert your influence with this boy? he is a romantic fool, and Sir Edward is not much better. If you endeavour to display our poverty in the same moving terms with which you so often favour me, and which with

me are completely lost—why, then, I doubt of your success. You will possess northern estates—I will spend the income, and Frederic will inherit the spirit, and Frederic will inherit them. They do not need them here, and a wealthy union they will still less require. Julia,” said he, sinking his voice to a softness—“will you refuse your husband? you not grant his request?”

“Never! Never will I humble myself. Our poverty?—it is false;—and Frederic would scorn it. Oh! why is the father like the son!”

“Because he inherits his mother’s weakness; had he the spirit of his father, the whole Meredeth property had been his. My plan failed I know not; but if Frederic assisted, all had been right.”

“Thank Heaven, your schemes were defeated. And Edward—oh, Rinaldo, does it not break your heart to relent—to relinquish all your plans—when you reflect that Edward knew

there was an attempt on his liberty? Perhaps," said she, shuddering, "more;—but, no—I will not believe that;—and Edward has been just the same—ever kind to us—ever generous—he only gave you a hint that he had discovered and forgave the attempt. Oh! if he knew whose repining discontent had marred the happiness of his life, how different would be his conduct! He would not—he could not—forgive the devastation your disappointment has created; but yet, Rinaldo, I do not think you anticipated the fatal result of your insinuations, or I do believe you would have relented."

"You know, dearest Julia, I was ever guided by my love for you. It was your comfort, your state in society, I sought to secure, and render worthy of you. How could I foresee the folly of Mrs. Penruddock?—Don't look so terrified, dearest—I will not mention her. And you, sweet Julia, have no cause to reproach yourself;—be composed—be comforted, love—and for the sake of your dear son, your darling Frederic, and

band's neck, and wept
seldom in private that his
or soothing ; the Countess
intensity of youthful pas-
attachment of a wife. :
as vices, though as such
ledge them ; but she lov-
a bitter conflict had she
of virtue and honour and
a wife. Long did she v-
pire who fawns while it
victim, so did the Cou-
feelings, and pervert her
many a wily charm had
liar to him as the breath-
pent beguiling Eve, so d-
plausible reasons, endeav-

began to hope he had succeeded—his wife would aid him, and then his success was certain. “I will draw a brief abstract of what I wish you to say, sweet Julia—for my sake you will do it, my own love.” The Count took a pen and wrote a few lines, then putting them in the hands of the Countess, “Read that, my dearest,” said he, “and you will find no difficulty, I trust, in complying with my request.” The paper specified that Sir Henry Meredith had told his daughter he always intended Merry Wood Dale for her; but that he did not like to will it from his son—therefore he left it under such terms as he did not think would be complied with. “This is all, love; and I have no doubt that such were your father’s intentions, else he would never have inserted so strange a clause; perhaps, my sweetest, if you reflect, you may remember some words to that effect—some direction that your father might have given, without your comprehending it at the time;—it was so—was it not, darling Julia?” Julia made no reply, and he continued

themselves. I knew my
desert her children—he
who doats on her with the
affection. To-morrow, then,
Sir Edward, before the
I know that will not take
previous to the wedding
not to let things proceed
dearest, we will retire to

The Count had been
in his softest, most insinuat-
ing manner, and she had
had seldom, perhaps never
before, the Countess : he had even
said that she had proved a will-
ingness whom she loved with the
though esteem had imper-
ceptibly slipped away, unknown even to her

submission, and what had been given at first to love, was now also continued by habit ; but in the present case he went too far, even for her blind obedience ;—the positive falsehood—the wish to defraud—to rob the generous brother who had disregarded the many attempts lately made by Bertini to effect his intention ; oh, no ! she could not acquiesce ;—and when the Count repeated his wish to retire, his timid wife plainly and absolutely refused to mention the subject to Sir Edward ; and expressed her determination, in the most positive manner, not to aid him in any project tending to the Merry Wood Dale estate. Vain would be any attempt to describe the rage, the overwhelming torrent of anger and abuse, that flowed from the lips of Bertini, who not only forgot the feelings of a husband and a gentleman, but absolutely seemed to lose all traits of humanity. The violence and lowness of his invectives made the Countess hope that insanity might be urged as a palliation for his gross, outrageous conduct ;—it was a dreadful idea ;

but it carried consolation
crime—a horrible alternative
native at which no one could
Bertini sought to conciliate
firm, and the night wore a
tention. At length Bertini
at break of day, to bed, not
schemes to effect his purp
geance against his wife wh
Italy.

Nothing of moment occur
tween the evening on whic
took place, and the Monday
pointed for the wedding,
family were to meet at the

The dinner passed off as
it was a painful effort to Mr
Edward, and it required m
port the interview; while, a
both determined never, if
another meeting. At the
ruddock, Evelyn undertook

Sir Edward concealed his feelings under an assiduous attention to his youthful hostess, who was assisted, on the other hand, by Count Bertini; and the animated conversation and lively jests of the two gentlemen passed current for real mirth and happiness. The Countess Bertini occasionally spoke a few words to Mr. Penruddock, to which she received answers, but no more; and then a silence of some time ensued, which neither attempted to break. Lucy was really happy; and her light and jocund laugh, which excited a corresponding cheerfulness in her lover, enabled Walter to conceal his inward pangs. There was the being with whom he had fondly hoped to pass a long, and with her it must have been a happy life, on the eve of marriage with one whom he had himself introduced to her notice; they were now in their relative situations of host and hostess, and Walter was obliged to feign the composure he did not feel, which he feared he should never feel again. That Evelyn and Laura were silent, and not disposed to add

pleasures and joys pect

"Fancy reign uncontroll

Notwithstanding the

part of the company, an

another, it was a welc

gave the signal to the

Walter rose hastily and

them. Laura, as hoste

as she bowed to Walte

trived to put a small pie

In the surprise and hurry

nearly let it fall to the

collecting himself, he c

whatever it might be, and

the table. Mr. Penrude

guests for leaving them,

vere head-ache, which w

unable to continue. The Count and Sir Edward were in conversation respecting a local transaction, and both required some information which Reuben Barwell was alone able to give. At their request, he entered fully into the subject, thus leaving Walter and Evelyn to their own thoughts and company; apparently those reflections were equal to their amusement, for neither spoke for some short space, during which Walter contrived to read the slip of paper. It was a request to speak a few words with him in the summer parlour before he joined the tea-table in the drawing-room. He had some difficulty to refrain from leaving the dining-room immediately, and proceeding to the appointed place. Much he pondered respecting the possible or probable motive for this request: what could Miss Penruddock wish to communicate that she should request his presence?

Walter's patience at last was exhausted, and perceiving that Evelyn was also abstracted and not disposed to be sociable, he slightly men-

the room. He would
say, "I will accompa
hasty retreat, and pro
crossed part of the lawn
garden, where, finding
parlour open, though it
tated a few moments at
the open window.

No one was in the
Walter was too well ac
sition of the furniture to
ing the sofa, where he
Laura or some other
patience was not put to
footstep sounded along
Penruddock entered the
small lamp in her hand

her who held full possession of his heart, she said in a low but distinct voice, "I trust I have not kept you waiting long, Mr. Rayland?" Walter's reply, if he made one, was not audible; that she should request an interview at all was most surprising, but a secret one!—Walter feared to speak lest he should lose the explanation of so extraordinary a request. "I have trespassed, I fear, on your patience; and when you understand why I sought this meeting, you will perhaps laugh and ridicule my weakness."

"It is rather for me to fear that my conduct must have given you an unfortunate impression of my disposition, Miss Penruddock."

"Not so, indeed, but I wish to ask your assistance, without being able to say for what purpose."

"You can perhaps inform me why you conceive my aid might be useful?"

"I can tell you all I know myself, and that is very little; but hush! surely I heard some one move—are we alone?"

received notes ; and pieced
placed in my room, all to

“ And that, Miss Percival,
perceiving she hesitated
me.”

“ Oh no ! they related
spoke of danger that might

“ Then Mr. Meredith
per person to be made a

Walter was a little piqued
entertain him with her as
favoured rival !

“ The papers cautioned
him, but to procure the aid
who will be ever watchful
render what aid may be
not the threatened danger
is great : to no one but a

depended on.—My father, you know, Mr. Rayland, is lost to the world—then to whom could I apply?"

"There is Mr. Barwell."

"True,"—and he would willingly comply with my request, but he is not an inmate of the same house with Mr. Meredith. My warnings speak of danger, but when or where they say not; but a true heart and a brave spirit are indispensable, so says my anonymous informer, and where shall I find such qualities if you refuse?"

"You flatter me, lady," said Walter, with some bitterness, "but I will not refuse, even though my aid be required for one who has gained the prize I so ardently coveted. Forgive me, dearest Laura—let me once more call you so; forgive me that I cannot at once, and with calmness, relinquish those hopes that for the last two years I so fondly nourished; pardon my presumption, and believe——"

"Mr. Rayland, this is not to the purpose. Will you assist me in my endeavours? Some

vent—will you be that f

“ I will, so help me I
that I should presume
danger, I trust, is imagi
may be, I will be watch
over; and then, lady, I
on other shores I may f
wishes—forget the flatt
told me Laura Penrude
to my love, and not too
I have been punished fo

“ Mr. Rayland, if y
leave you. You forget
the wife of another,—of

“ Would I could forg
have you no clew to the

“ None ! But danger

“ I will be watchful.

The word grated on the ears of Walter, but he restrained his feelings, and assured Laura of his "care and aid."

"I expected no less, Mr. Rayland. I was sure you could not act ungenerously. Now then, you will remember to keep as much with Evelyn as possible, to be attentive to every circumstance relating to him, and then, my informer says, the peril may be avoided. I acknowledge I am occasionally inclined to give little heed to my repeated warnings. But the time is short, and a little care will not trespass much on your patience: and now, if you please, we will return to the company; and as my informer appears to be well acquainted with our movements, it may be as well if we do not return together;—I will meet you in the drawing-room."

As Walter proceeded to obey the directions of Laura, he pondered over their interview, and felt inclined to leave them all to arrange their concerns as they pleased or could, so that he had no hand in the settlement. It was in his

he cursed the folly that
bourhood of Astol: that
should have such serious
was what no one could h
least of all Walter Rayla
plated at all, save on the
He was tempted at one
Hall and leave the Mano
the forest altogether. E
ever, prevailed,—he woul
had real cause for her
that he doubted), he woul
ability, endeavour to aid
tations were dismissed
drawing-room, where all
exception of Mr. Penrudd
They separated early, on t
through the forest. It w

in this instance the offer was unwillingly made by the Lord of the Manor, and positively declined by his guests, who returned to Westwell before midnight.

When Walter took possession of his couch, his thoughts naturally reverted to every circumstance connected with, or bearing towards the warnings received by Laura, and those conveyed to him by Dick Roberts, and these seemed somehow linked with his seizure at Rome. From what he had seen and heard of the Meredith family, the only person to whom suspicion could point in this affair, as the author of the past, and the actor in the threatened danger, was the Count Bertini. There might be others, certainly, but Walter had never heard of any other near relative. The castle to which he was conducted—the strange remarks that were uttered by Bertini respecting himself, Evelyn, and his love for Laura—the secret visits to the yacht, and the observation of Mrs. Roberts, seemed strong evidence against the Count. Then

the writer of the letter a
on his liberty :—if Bert
it probable that Sir Ed
terms of the most broth
who had so acted ?—In V
it was impossible ;—if
to be apprehended, it
sources—it could not
again, his thoughts wor
warnings—then revolve
of Bertini, till, bewilde
contradictory opinions, I
be silent and vigilant, as
Count : his care would
idea brought a bitter co
length, amid a variety
trary opinions and resol

with one who had attempted so gross an outrage on his liberty and property; but Sir Edward's feelings had suffered so severely from the supposed treachery of those he loved, that it had lowered his opinion of mankind in general, and merely to covet wealth was a venial error, a trifle, compared with the alleged transgressions of others. He was perfectly aware that Bertini was the instigator of the attempt at Rome, which he treated as an annoying but pardonable frolic; and as he really loved Bertini, he took no further notice of the attack than to inform him of his knowledge of such attempt, and likewise of his determination to prevent all further ideas on this subject, by immediately arranging his affairs, so as to place the identity of Evelyn beyond doubt, as lawful heir to the name, honours, and estates of the Meredeth family:—that this was not sufficient, so far as related to the northern estate, has already been shown by the conversation between Bertini and his wife.

CHAPTER XIII.

She was a pensive dame, and sometimes sad,
 But nature surely meant her to be glad;
 Her eye, at times, would kindle bright and free,
 And the gay laugh would ring right merrilie;
 But these were meteor gleams, and fled as soon
 As vapours in the burning hour of noon.

WALTER might have forgotten the whole respecting the yacht, Evelyn, and the warm had not the image of Laura graven the particulars in his memory. The next day he was an attentive observer of what passed, but there was nothing to warrant his suspicions—all appeared open and candid on the part of the Count; and, at length, Walter was almost regretting that he was bound to secrecy, and he must not confess to Bertini how much he had injured him in idea; but, however, this pleasant state would soon be over, there were but two days between the present hour and

appointed for the ceremony which was to take place in the chapel at the Manor House. They were at breakfast when Evelyn inquired if Walter was disposed for a ride to the Manor House, where his presence was required to fix on a proper place to erect some cottages; and if Mr. Rayland had no engagement, he would be thankful for his company and opinion. Walter was in no humour for such employment—"He had no taste; Mr. Meredith would only find him an incumbrance."

"Perhaps you may change your mind," said Evelyn, "and if so, you will find me prepared at twelve, till then I shall be studying law with our friend Philip—and when you are disposed to follow my example, I shall be able to give you some instruction in the legal way."

Walter really did feel a sincere friendship for Evelyn, and most truly did he wish him happy, but he was very unwilling to witness his happiness. Now, to ride with him to Mr. Penruddock's was placing himself in the very position

which, of all others, he wished to avoid. He declined the proposal, and Evelyn departed saying, "As Mr. Rayland would not accompany him, he might probably remain that night at the Manor House, and return home early in the morning—but it would depend on circumstances."

Few persons would have imagined that a joyful event was in agitation: there were no signs of mirth that day at Westwell Park, when Philip Deverel and Sir Edward were in company—they were cheerful: the Baronet assumed gaiety, the lawyer's was natural—the Count insinuating, the Lady Bertini silent and dull, and Walter Rayland as unlike himself as a person could well be. The day passed tardily—the hours appeared to creep; Walter, to keep up his spirits, was continually dwelling on the thought, that this trial would soon be over, and that long or short minutes will pass. At dinner even Sir Edward seemed under the influence of *ennui*; and the young lawyer, after a few ineffectual attempts to support a conversation

which scarcely any one joined, at length desisted, saying, "His companions were all suddenly gifted with a grand talent *pour le silence*;" and deeming it useless to resist so general an example, he became as taciturn as the rest. A remark was occasionally made respecting the weather and the return of Mr. Meredeth, to which no reply was given or required.

In the evening, Count Bertini proposed the game of chess to Walter; there was no necessity to speak at chess, and Walter for that reason complied, allowing his antagonist to beat him most unmercifully. Sir Edward was engaged with a book, and the young aspirant for legal honours drew out his note-book and made memorandums. A long silence prevailed, which was broken by Walter, who called out suddenly,—"What an enviable fellow you are, Phil!—I wish I was a lawyer!"

"Let me calculate," returned Deverel, "whether I shall exchange with you—an independent country gentleman, with a clear improvable

in the hand is worth a
proverb is on your side
like to soar, so the woo
main safe in your posse

"I wish, Julia," said
play or sing something
nervous walking about t

The Lady Bertini to
mark, but walked even

"I wonder what the
are about," said Sir E
is nothing new in the l
this *cnnui*!—it has taken
is the anticipation of thi
us. I, for one, shall be
over; and Julia, dear
Italy with you:—there
ing to me than turtle do

way. My dear sister, you really have the fidgets this evening ;—come, sit down and sing something."

"I cannot sing."

"Not sing! you, who have a voice like a nightingale?—come, fancy yourself one—and fancy also that I am your pet flower, your 'darling rose,' and try if these vapours will not pass away." The lady shook her head. "What, it will not do!—Well, fancy is not always at our command—it will not ever obey our call; so I must not press you to sing one of your national airs—an Italian one, I mean—I am very apt to fancy you a native of Italy."

"What makes a native if Julia is not one?" enquired the Count, looking up from his game.

"Why, not merely being born and bred there."

"In my simplicity I fancied it everything."

"You are wrong then, Count. Julia's ancestors were all Britons, and though she was born and bred under southern skies, yet she was sur-

English.

"We must have legal
scribe to that. What say

"That I wish I belonged
my cares and sorrows were
where sorrow cannot enter

Count Bertini laughed;
unnatural to the ears of
pathos in the lady's words
was sincerity in them.

with Walter, but he could
of sorrow without committing

"You are sadly in the
evening, my love," said he
easterly wind; I have been
with it."

"I wish we had our portraits
to-night, they would so

subdue a host of blue devils. I have been told that my intended daughter-in-law is naturally as gay, if not more so, than her companion, though no one would suppose it."

"Ladies," observed the Count, "think it proper to assume a pensive air when on the eve of their nuptials."

"Miss Moreton is on the eve of her nuptials also."

"True; but there may be some difference between Miss Moreton and Miss Penruddock."

"Not in this case; they are both engaged to men whom they have themselves selected."

"Not exactly selected. Men do not grow on trees in the forest like acorns; and, if I am rightly informed, they have never left Astol. My dear Julia, as you are so nervous you will be better perhaps in bed. Let me advise you to retire, love."

The Countess made no reply to the advice of her lord, which, being given in the kindest manner and with the softest voice, surely merited

some acknowledgment ; but no, the nervous
or as Walter thought, the sulky lady, disd
to answer, though she soon after left the a
ment. He made several false moves while
imagination wandered to all he had heard,
or seen of women, and he was not dispos
the present moment to think well of them.
that he had seen much bad in his own dom
circle, but that might be because his mother
sister were in possession of good health, g
spirits, and above all, good fortune ; it woul
too bad if they were to be whimsical. Wa
forgot that prosperity will create whims.
began to think it was quite as well that he h
no prospect of being more nearly connec
with a sex so variable, "uncertain, coy, a
hard to please." Memory supplied him w
numberless invectives, which, like capping vers
he now joined one to another.

"Check-mate, Mr. Rayland," said the Cou
triumphantly adding, "I never saw a ga
better commenced nor worse ended : had

been playing in masks, I should have staked a large sum on the supposition that I had changed my antagonist. Are you for another game?"

"I thank you, no; not even to retrieve my credit as a chess-player. Without you intend remaining up till Mr. Meredith's return, I shall follow the example of Lady Bertini and retire."

"Is she gone? She will be better to-morrow—your cold clime does not agree with her, Sir Edward; though you do not call her an Italian, she is so by constitution, and her spirits are affected. In Naples she is always cheerful; on her account I must hasten our departure—it makes me miserable to see her so low and nervous. There are sorrows as well as joys in a married life; but if my dearest Julia had but better health I should have no cause to complain of them. You, Sir Edward, must perceive a great change in your sister?"

"She certainly is very sad. I have sometimes attributed it to being separated from her family."

"It may be so; and in that case it would be

which was to put the seal on his fallen hopes; but he would bear it; he would not, at the last minute, proclaim his misery, his disappointment;—whatever he might suffer hereafter, he would conceal and master his feelings now; and he trusted, when all was over, that the certainty of the event would go far to effect his cure; but at present he must feel, and feel deeply. He paced his apartment for some time with rapid and heavy steps, and perhaps might have continued this exercise half the night, had he not been interrupted by the entrance of Deverel.

“What penance are you performing, Sir Walter, that you work so hard to wear out this gay carpet?”

“And what keeps you from your bed, Deverel?”

“Why, I am not sleepy; and as you hint at some long journey before you visit London, I thought we might as well have a parting conference; so sit down and listen to my plans, and then, as in duty bound, I will attend to yours.”

"That is, su-
municative ;—b
gossip with you
place this letter
ing himself.

"I?—no."

"This is a str
the post comes i
der who it is from

"Open it, and
from whom and h

Walter did ope
the writer of this
little penetration
Mr. Rayland will
the injured can be
tected. The write
Mr. Rayland reall
tributed to him, h
Most ardently do
assistance may not
less night will be

note may occasion :—if so, Mr. Rayland is conjured to believe it was no light motive that prompted the appeal. If Mr. Rayland will accede to the prayer of the writer, he is requested to open his door, and just put the candle outside for one moment ; and then he will provide himself with arms, and remain in readiness to attend any call that may this night be made on his time and patience. Should the hours till day-break pass over without such call, the next kindness he can do will be to forget he received this note ; and he is earnestly intreated never to mention nor allude to it in any way."

Walter read the note aloud, and when he came to the part where secrecy was requested, it was too late to obey the direction.

"As I dearly love an adventure," said Philip, "it happens luckily for me that your correspondent put the caution at the end of the note. Now I am embarked in the enterprise, I may as well render my assistance : if arms are requisite, arms will be needful to use them ; so here are mine at your command, Walter."

events, we will obey the
spondent."

"Have you any idea
may be required—for wh

"I have some suspic
occurrences have arisen to
I gave little heed to."

"May I know them?"

"Really I know not
know so much, it will m
you know more."

"Well, then, I will put
way—Does this affair r
you the person threatened

"Oh, no."

"Can you name the res

claimed Walter; "I will hasten to Sir Edward, and impart the cautions and warnings I have received." Walter rose from his chair, with the intention of proceeding to the room of the Baronet, when a voice, low and smothered, yet clear enough to be distinctly heard, said, "No, remain where you are; if your aid be required, you will be summoned."

"By heavens, this is strange!" exclaimed Philip, rushing to the door with the idea of detecting the intruder, but no intruder was there: a single lamp burned in the gallery, but no person was visible. "This is passing strange, indeed!"

Walter opened the door into the adjoining room; it was vacant: the closets were next examined, large and small: some might hold a human being, others were not sufficiently large to conceal a cat; but all were searched. When the young men were satisfied that no person was near, they resumed their seats. "If this," said Walter, "had occurred at the Manor House, I

should not have been surprised ; that seems to be a very abode of mystery ; but here, in a modern building, with all new and open——"

"The window," interrupted Philip.

"Ah, true—there is a small balcony or terrace in front of this room : how came I not to think of that before ?" As Walter spoke he opened the window and looked out in the balcony, which ran along one side of the building. It was a clear, but sufficient time had elapsed for the intruder to effect a retreat.

"Whose apartments open into this gallery, Walter ?"

"I do not know ; but I believe they are spare rooms, and appropriated to visitors ; there is a slight partition between each chamber ; but it is easily removed, or you may step over—it is a barrier merely of courtesy."

"You do not know whose rooms open into this balcony ?"

"No."

"The intruder is gone, however, that is cer-

tain, and now I will continue my examination."

Various were the questions put and answered: many, Walter thought, had no reference to the case in point; but the lawyer thought otherwise; and Rayland, who had often witnessed the shrewdness and clear judgment of his companion, made no difficulty in replying to his demands. When Deverel appeared satisfied he remained silent for a short time, and when he resumed the conversation it was by asking Walter if he had suspicion of any particular person or persons?

"I would rather not answer your question," was the reply.

"Did it never strike you as singular that the Count should have a friend in the yacht, a sick friend, and yet never invite him on shore? Sir Edward seems the very soul of hospitality."

"The Count's friend is in ill health."

"Have you no suspicion that way?"

"How is it possible to suspect one who seems

too open, too amiable
to his nephew, to fo
plot against his happ

"Humph," said t
friend Walter has
query; but there is,"
motive for the Count
person against whom

"You mean Merry
of the singular clause
not large enough to t
lain,"

"Not so very trifling
a year, and may be mor
there are coal-mines on

"I am confident," sa
—for though he used the
doubtingly — "that yo
would almost pledge—

"Never pledge yours
Philip, interrupting him;
human nature than you

it is true—I have seen less of the fashionable world, but that is not life—there you all wear a mask, and all disguise your feelings, all is smooth and polished, your surface is fair. I have seen life in other forms, where no disguise can avail, where man is shown in his best and worst colours—a court of law is the place to study character, not a royal court. The result of my experience leads me to a very different conclusion.”

“And what may that be?”

“That the Count Bertini is a villain!”

“Philip Deverel, you forget where you are! You are under the roof of the Count’s brother, benefiting by his generosity.”

“True,” replied Philip, interrupting Walter in his turn, “it is very true, and that is one reason why I give my opinion so freely;—but remember, Walter, only to you do I give it. The Count Bertini is not what he seems; his insinuating suavity of manner will not pass cur-

rent with one who has seen so much of the worst part of our sex as I have."

"Then you would infer that bluntness and want of polish is essential to truth?"

"Pardon me, I would infer no such thing, but insinuating softness alone would never induce me to judge favourably of a witness—I am getting professional."

"You are judging professionally truly, as I am no lawyer, I must endeavour to keep my opinion of my friend's worth and integrity."

"Nor am I so bigoted to mine as not to rejoice if you are right."

"I do not pretend to a knowledge of character, or I would say the lady's disposition appears by no means amiable."

"The Countess Bertini?" inquired Devereux.

"Yes; there is a sullen silence about her that is far from pleasing, and I often feel inclined to pity the man who is tied to her life, only he does not seem to require pity."

"Again our opinions differ, but if we are to keep vigils all night, I wish they had placed a bottle with glasses between us; I am very apt to fall asleep without some amusement."

"I believe I can accommodate you in that respect, for I returned this morning after lunch, and being wet from walking in the marshes, they sent me wine and biscuits up here, and here I believe they are now."

"Lucky, by Jove—and now, Walter, success to our enterprise!"

The friends continued in conversation, and while the bottle lasted they heeded not the lapse of time. The wine, however, was finished, and then the idea occurred that the writer of the note was making sport with them.—"I begin," said Deverel, "to think bed no unpleasant place; it is past two."

"What is that, when you think of London hours?"

"True, but now we are keeping country hours, dine at six, bed at ten, and up with the

early dawn :—I do
Walter, and we shall
morrow morning.”

“ If I thought that
earnest—at all even
night.”

Their patience was
trial; a hurried and
was promptly answered
the window : it was
lamp gave no light so
they could perceive so
balcony : there was no
person spoke directly
side, saying,

“ Mr. Rayland, are you

“ Quite ;—but for what

“ To rescue your friend
paddock by the stable
of the servants prepare
the water with the wild
the shore near the forei

till you see some sailors approach the beach for the purpose of embarking, then rush on them, and your own judgment will guide you further."

" 'Mighty vague directions,' as Mr. Pepys would say," said Deverel, as they passed through some of the offices and proceeded to the paddock. "Wild fowl—it will be a wild goose expedition, I imagine; but now we are doing something, I like it—it was stupid enough to sit still and conjecture."

"This way, gentlemen; we are all ready," said one of the servants—"we can take a shorter way than the road."

"Be quick, then."

"We are rather late, Sir; but when we get near the water we must be silent, or the birds will take wing, and then our sport is over. I wish we had known before that you desired this sport—there were several better nights last week."

"As the hour is late," observed Walter, "we

more sportsman-like man
next attack on the poor!

The party proceeded
speed. Walter and De
be spared communicat
their situation was altog
traordinary, that it had
dream than reality. A
was heard—no dog gave
as they passed a solit
darkness of the night wa
of wickedness. On a s
before them directly
pointed it out to Walte
clared it must be a “W

“It is a smuggler’s

man in the same outfit

were descending the bank, a rough, but low voice grumbled forth, " Who goes there? Why the devil don't you give the pass-word? Who goes there, I say, and be d——d to you?—I'll fire, if you don't speak!"

" We are friends," answered one of the men.

" Friends! if so give the word."

" We are friends," repeated Walter, " from the Hall; and who are you, and by what right do you stop persons who are quietly pursuing their way?"

" I'll be d——d if I don't know that voice from the Hall. Why, then, you are friends;—pray, Sir," said he coming close to Walter, " do you recollect my voice?"

" I am not quite certain, but I should say you are Dick Roberts."

" All's well; and you are the young gentleman my wife takes so much care of."

" Well, then, now we are known to one another, we need not interfere with the pursuits of either: so good night, my friend Roberts."

"But which way?"
Walter considered
answered, and then said
"I first saw you, when
could not effect their landing."

"Ah, but you are not
are a mile from the spot,
and I will guide you."

The man gave a low bow
for a moment; he then
"Now, Sir, I'm for you;
path they were taking,
they were at the place
attempted a landing."

"You've chosen a bad
Sir; I doubt you'll go home
booty," said the sailor.

"We shall have had time
stroll."

"Not much of that either
past some hours; but, list to
another birding party?—I
not so plentiful."

" Devil doubts you, Roberts," whispered one of the men; " you have your own pranks, and don't want interruption."

" Take care, Master Gregson, that your pranks are such as not to fear the daylight; ours are honest enough—take care that pretty Mary at the Mill says the same of yours. What the devil! this party are making for the beach, and there is a boat coming on shore. Hollo, friends! What brings you out at this time?"

" What brings you out—the same errand,"

" Then you've no right here. This ground is occupied—so take care how you land your goods here again."

While the men spoke, Walter and Deverel came forward; and Walter, speaking in a loud voice, inquired why they were out so late? The men were commencing a rough answer of defiance, when a bustle took place among them, and the name of Rayland was heard from among the group. Walter and Deverel rushed forward—" Keep back," said one of the opposing

claimed the voice of Evel-
ter and his companion we
this was quite sufficient,
recognised the voice of
moment all was confusion
ing the voice of their yo
ciently prompt, without n
by Rayland to rescue Evel
ensued: there was one pe
the boat's crew; but this
the fray. The struggle
rate; the Westwell party
rior manner to the boat's
last was on their side. Ev
from his captors, and join
father's house. Some of

servants stumbled over the body of a man who was severely wounded. At first he was supposed to be dead, but a few moments, and the aid of a little brandy, proved that he was living; and might recover if comforts and surgical aid could be procured. They consulted whether he could be removed; and at length they contrived to form a litter of a hurdle and some long grass and fern. It was now day-break, and Dick Roberts proposed to take the wounded man to his house, as being much nearer than the Hall; but Deverel advised his being carried to the Hall, as his wound, even to them, appeared not serious. The man had fainted from loss of blood, but the wound was not in a vital part.

"This is a strange adventure, Mr. Meredeth," said Walter, when they were proceeding homewards. "Have you any idea of the perpetrators of this outrage?"

"We will not speak of it here," replied Evelyn. "But your aid was most essential,

Surely you must be
dare meditate such an act
of a noble family: such
succeed."

"It would, most certain
ference; the wind is fair,
missed at my father's the
under weigh."

"Do you know the au
of this most iniquitous pla

"I do; but say no more
know all in time."

On arriving at the Ha
was conveyed to a bed, a
appointed to take charge
tions not to ask him any q
was sent for, and the no

“And now, Evelyn,” said Walter, “can you satisfy our curiosity? I plead guilty to a most unconscionable share.”

“First tell me how you so opportunely came to my rescue; and why, at that time of the night, you should be on the shore, so far from your quiet pillows.”

Walter gave him a full and distinct account of the warning he had received from the smuggler, and of the interview with Laura on the evening of the dinner party at the Manor House, and lastly, of the directions they had received that night.

“It is a great consolation,” said Evelyn, “to find that though I have an enemy, I have, at the same time, so many friends, who kindly interest themselves in my welfare. I will not ask if you knew the person who took so active a part this last evening. There is much to be done this day, and my thanks shall be given at some more convenient season; your own feelings will explain mine. When the family meet at

breakfast, we will talk the night."

The hour for the morning
Edward and Rayland were in the
room. The host gave the
the salutation of the morning
hand he pressed it warmly.
Mr. Rayland, you have been
my behalf. I paid little
outrage was planned against
scarcely gave a second thought
determined to consider a
is serious, and some method
prevent a recurrence. I have
young friend, that there
feeling towards my son was
have been expected, either
or being the child of one
worshipped. You know my
—my doubts—my fears—
strove to disperse in a round
was it till the death of my p

that I felt for him the affection of a father. My doubts, when once ended, left room for the parental feeling, and Evelyn, though lately acknowledged, is dearer to me than words can express. You may judge then how much I estimate the service you have rendered us."

As Sir Edward spoke, the Countess Bertini entered the room. "I need not ask you," said her brother, "if you have heard of the attack on Evelyn last night? Your countenance tells plainly, my dear Julia, that you are not ignorant of the base scheme. But sit down—Mr. Rayland must be famished."

"No, indeed, I have made one breakfast, and am ready for another," continued Walter, merely by way of relieving the Countess from the agitation under which she appeared to labour. Evelyn and Philip soon after joined the party; the Count was the last to enter, and he, with a voice of kindness and interest, congratulated Sir Edward and his son on the escape of Evelyn, adding—

"It was the most daring outrage ever committed, my dear Evelyn, and much I regret your escape; it was a most fortunate circumstance that these young gentlemen planned a birding party for last night. I feel inclined to quarrel with them for not admitting me to their sport. I suppose they consider me too old for such exploits." The congratulations and remarks of the Count being received in silence, he was evidently confused; and in a hurried manner he continued, "To-morrow, if I will, I hope, put the seal on your happiness. It is rather a nervous ceremony, we are not sure whether our lot may be taken from the plain or the blank side of the balance; I should say there was not much fear in your venture. It is dangerous for the persons who attacked you that such an event is in agitation, as it insures them from any attempt at discovery; and yet it is a satisfaction that they should escape so, without your regarding the whole affair as a frolic."

"They will not escape," said Sir Edward.

a stern voice and with marked emphasis; "they will not escape! Julia, you eat nothing, let me give you some roll."

"I rejoice to find, Sir Edward, that you have some clew;—as we are all friends, Mr. Rayland and Mr. Deverel may, I am sure, be considered such, particularly after last night's adventure,—but as we are all, as we may say, belonging to the family, you will not object to relate your suspicions?"

"They are not suspicions, they are certainties; but if you please, Count Bertini, we will finish our meal; this matter may be talked over at some more fitting season."

The Count Bertini for a short space was silent, and then again he proceeded with his remarks, which being almost unanswered, had nearly the form of a soliloquy. The taciturn humour of his companions at last seemed unbearable, and in a moment of forgetfulness he turned sharply to his wife, and made some comment on her silence, in a tone of voice very different from his

usual bland and insinuating softness of manner. Rayland looked at him in evident surprise: his impatience increased—"He could not think," he said, "why people joined the table without desire to eat—you neither speak nor eat, Julia."

The Countess put a morsel towards her mouth, then as quickly replaced it on her plate. "I cannot speak, nor can I eat," said she; and rising from the table she left the room.

"Will you not follow my sister, Count? I fear she is ill."

"She will be better in her own room; she had a bad night, which I suppose is the reason why I heard none of the bustle attendant on the birding party, which prevented me from aiding my nephew."

The servants were now in the apartment removing the breakfast; and when they retired, Count Bertini was rising to leave the room; but Sir Edward interrupted him and requested he would remain.

"Mr. Deverel, Mr. Rayland, I must also beg

you will be present, and, Evelyn, you must not go."

They complied with the desire of their host and resumed their seats. Sir Edward rose from his chair, took a few agitated turns about the room, and then addressed his companions.

"It was my intention to have waived this subject entirely; but we cannot always command our temper or our feelings. I find mine, never much under subjection, are now uncontrollable. I must speak out. Count Bertini, the author of this attack on my son's liberty, perhaps his life, is well known unto me;—for family reasons I will let the secret remain with those who are present;—but we cannot be as we have been—we cannot inhabit the same house; to-morrow we all separate; perhaps it may suit your convenience to depart this day?—the vessel of your sick friend has sufficient accommodation. If Julia—if my sister could lengthen her stay in England, I should feel much satisfaction, but I fear she will not; therefore, whatever direc-

tions you will give your servants respecting your luggage, or whatever else you may desire, shall be attended to; and now I wish you a safe voyage, pleasant it can scarcely be. The wind is fair, Sir, and I recommend you to lose no time."

The Count at first seemed not to comprehend the purport of Sir Edward's speech; then his countenance changed;—he had never much colour, but an increased paleness crept over his features, which gave place to an angry and disdainful flush, while in a loud and imperative voice he asked, "Are you speaking to me, Sir Edward Meredith?"

"I am, Sir."

"Then speak plainly, if you please."

"I have done so; you understand me, Count, and so do these gentlemen."

"Sir Edward, I demand an explanation! I neither understand your words nor your insinuations."

"It is idle to contend, Count Bertini: I re-

peat my words, and advise you to leave Westwell as quickly as possible."

"By Heaven, Sir, before I leave this house I will have satisfaction!—one of these gentlemen will act as my friend—name your place, Sir!"

Sir Edward gave a glance of supreme contempt, but made no reply. The Count continued: "Sir Edward, I shall not leave till you give me a meeting, or else recall your words and apologize for them."

A scornful glance accompanied the reply of Sir Edward: "I advise you, Count, to be speedy in your arrangements; perhaps if you delay your departure beyond the time absolutely requisite, you may not find it so easy to depart: the laws of this land have power to keep you longer than you may consider pleasing."

The air of cool contempt with which the Baronet spoke was too much for the passionate and vindictive Italian; he burst into a torrent of abuse, to the utter surprise of Walter and the rest of the party, who could scarcely believe or

was so soft, so guarded, sequious. He saw, by the party, that he was detected power in that house was of incoherent explanation, for such, he suddenly grew his former indignant bear Sir," said he, addressing you reconcile this conduct and long friendship that I us."

"I repeat, Count Bertin conversation or altercation intimated my desire."

"You will turn your o roof, from the roof of her a conduct of a brother? For never repose here another

duct of a gentleman, and with base outrage thus insults one who has the right of a relative to kindness and hospitality. Sir Edward, you shall hear of this in a legal manner ! My good name is not to be taken from me, and slander can be punished."

" You will do what you please, Sir ; I have a witness of your intention—the wounded man is willing to make a full confession."

" The wounded man ! What wounded man ? "

" The man who was injured in the affair last night. He is ready to depose that he was employed by you to remove my son."

The Count turned deadly pale ; for a few seconds he appeared confounded, then, as if all further disguise was unnecessary, he gave way to the anger and disappointment that raged in his mind—acknowledged his intention to keep Evelyn in concealment till past the period that would secure the estate for his wife and son ;—vowed still to leave no means untried till he had accomplished his end ; and dared Sir Edward to

take any steps to prevent or publish his intention to the world.

"It is not my wish," returned Sir Edward, "to make my poor sister more unhappy than she already is, nor would I distress your son, the worthy son of an unworthy sire;—Frederic would scorn the property so gained—his heart and mind are noble as his mother's, and for that sake I will spare you, but you must leave England, and never return. For the estate in question, I would give twice the value of it to secure my poor Julia some portion of peace and comfort; nor shall it ever again be the cause of dissension. I will arrange with Frederic concerning an equivalent; but you, Count Bertini, shall be rewarded for your villany. Evelyn's marriage will secure this estate to him, and at some future period my sister's son shall have the full value of it. Mr. Deverel and Mr. Raylam will bear witness to my engagement; and you, Mr. Deverel, I commission to write to my nephew on the subject. And now, Count B

tini, you are, I hope, satisfied, and your departure, I trust, will not be retarded."

"Satisfied!—Retarded! No, I am not satisfied. I claim the whole in right of my wife; nor will I relinquish my claim!"

Deverel here interposed and reminded him that the marriage of Mr. Meredith would destroy his claim for ever. The Count was deaf to all but his passion; he avowed the arts he had used to set Sir Edward Meredith against his wife; he gloried in the success of his scheme, and cursed the care of Mrs. Aubrey, who had protected the infant heir of Westwell;—he acknowledged the plans he had formed for the removal of the child, which, by the care of his protectress, had been prevented—boasted of the doubts he threw on his legitimacy;—"and now, Sir Edward," he continued, "there is not one act that can come under legal cognizance. I destroyed your happiness, and your wife's life was the sacrifice, and she deserved it, for she scorned——"

He was interrupted and exclaimed, "Great Villain, dastard, fiend, I forgive you, but the cowardly scoundrel who moved the table that separated me from Deverel forcibly and intreated him to give up the satisfaction of witnessing my revenge. He evidently exulted at my triumph."

"I will be calm," he said, after a long and painful struggle. "I wish to put a few questions which will give pain, I have no doubt, but I feel pleasure in replying to them. You included the family in your diabolical scheme?—the innocent victims of offence—there was no reason for them to which you could refer. What caused your hatred?"

"I had no hatred to them," he replied. "My fittest agents, Mr. Pennington, detected my interference."

person for the supposed lover of your wife. Mrs. Penruddock's death was occasioned by her own folly: if she in a moment of madness chose to destroy herself, how could I prevent it? Nay, I was sorry for her death, but I had no hand in it, nor has it ever caused me one pang; and now, Sir Edward, is your catechism ended?"

"And you acknowledge the destruction of two families—one to whom you were nearly connected, and the other you were bound to by the ties of friendship; you confess that you destroyed the happiness and lives of many, for the paltry estate of Merry Wood Dale?"

"I did expect more,—but that was my right; though had you relinquished that property at once, you might all have lived well and happily for me."

"Merciful heaven! can such a monster have been permitted to pursue his savage plans against virtue and goodness, not to be matched again on earth? One more question: why did you not openly declare your wish?"

"Declare it!—I have to persuade your sister that she is obstinacy itself. if my cross-examination to comply with the order of hospitable host—Lady Be time for preparation."

"Listen to me, wretch t

"Of course, I will listen to epithets."

"I will give you the full Wood Dale estate would provide my sister, my poor Julia, belong to my care, and the money immediately."

"A tempting offer, truly! I have accepted it, but I happen and in this case I may love to shall not stay with you, because her and your pleasure. You know nor will I relinquish the estate."

"By Heaven! she shall stay leave her home with such a heart

"Call me what you please: but I have trained Julia well—she will go with me because she considers it her duty. And now what else? It is like the pious, moral Sir Edward Meredith to wish to separate man and wife."

"Father!" said Evelyn, "can you bear this?"

"I ought to bear more, my son, when I reflect that one so base should have made me the unnatural father that I was to your infancy; when I think of the sorrows of your early days, and the misery caused to others by my credulity! I shudder, indeed, when imagination recalls the past. There is one consolation, that you will now be happy."

"Happy!" interrupted Bertini, with a demoniacal laugh. "Happy! Yes, he will be happy, when united to a girl whose heart is not his! Happy! when Miss Penruddock loves another!"

The opinion of all the party present was, that if the Count was in his senses, he was too contemptible to merit indignation; but this attack

on Laura was more than
and he was breaking out
Evelyn stopped him.

"Degrade not," said he
nocent Laura, by defendin
such a person will fall har

"Tis well you think s
love Mr. Rayland while th
deth. "The pure, the it
meditate giving her hand to
is devoted to another:—bu
correct, all proper, in the
And now, gentlemen, I must
sorry for the necessity, but m
quire directions. Farewell,
Mr. Meredith; flatter not
shall relinquish my claim. Ge
to Walter and Deverel, "I wis
ing. And happiness to you, I
a woman who loves another.—
As Bertini spoke he left the room
"It is dreadful," said Sir E

reflect on the misery caused by the rapacity of Bertini and my credulity. Against warning, against conviction, I believed Bertini as just, honourable, and sincere, as he is insinuating and treacherous. How many lives have been sacrificed—and how much wretchedness has been the effect of his insatiable desire for wealth! To have prevented the dreadful catastrophe which followed his machinations, I would have bestowed all my property, and so would William Penruddock.—And my poor Julia!—I dare not reflect on her destiny.”

CHAPTER XI

Come, haste thee, Myra, see
 The race is over, and thy love
 Twine the bright tresses of
 And show thyself the fairest
 Nay, blush not, maiden, 'twas
 Reward the victor with unfad

WALTER saw no more of his countess
 the day. Evelyn was closeted
 Deverel, nor did he leave him
 held a long and private conference
 father. The Count and Countess
 visible, as might be expected; but
 preparation sounded in their apartments
 and packages were removed to
 was to Walter a tedious and a wearisome
 repeatedly he asked himself "Will
 "It must be three o'clock," said he
 his watch,—it was only one.

self in such a predicament again, I shall deserve it." He tried the library,—it was impossible to read; he walked to the terrace-room and looked over the balustrade, in search of some object to interest him, if only for a minute; alas! the scene had no beauty, there were neither rocks nor precipices—it was a dull flat view, all woodland, and a broad piece of water in the distance: the sea was at the termination of that water,—but what of that? It was too far off to count the waves or hear the dash. The trees were grand to be sure, large and majestic, the "giants of the forest," but there were too many; the lawns were green, but they were too smooth, they spoke too much of the gardener; the early flowers the same; the park was too vast—it was more like a chase, and the farms and cottages that were scattered and placed in the most advantageous manner for the beauty of the prospect, were too trim, too neat and comfortable; there was nothing picturesque in such trimness: they might be very comfortable,

to be sure, and the inhabitants might be thriving and happy, but what had that to do with his point of view? Walter did not believe anybody could be happy in that atmosphere; he was sure he could not—he liked not such smooth, tame scenery. How unlike the Alps, the vales of Switzerland, or the beauty of Italy! “Well,” he ended as he began, “it is the last: I shall be far enough by this time to-morrow; and then I shall forget all these hopes, fears, and disappointments.”

The day was not a pleasant one with any of the forest party. At the Manor House it was even sad. Mr. Penruddock was always sad—he could not be more so: he had been for years in the extreme of sorrow, which could neither be increased nor diminished in his own opinion, though there he was wrong; it would have been greatly augmented had he been as clear-sighted as the Count Bertini—had he been fully aware of the state of his daughter's affections. He had no intention of influencing Laura, and, therefore

he supposed he had not ; but could he have seen the wan cheek and listless form that sat lost and abstracted in the midst of Lucy's unceasing remarks respecting the finery with which the room was filled, and the ceremony that was to take place the next morning, he might have judged differently.

Lucy, like the Count, had sufficient penetration to read matters aright, but she would not betray her knowledge, as the arrangements were unalterable ; she rather endeavoured to rouse and amuse her thoughtful companion. " We shall be staid, grave matrons, this time next year, Laura," said she, after having pointed out the beauty of the various trinkets that filled the tables,—“ getting grave, if not grey ; and our husbands,—what a horrid sound ! —do you know, Laura, I've a great mind not to be married, because I dislike that word—it seems to me another name for tyrant.”

“ You should have thought of that before, Lucy,” said Mrs. Weston ; “ it is rather too late

“Don't talk of it, Mrs. V
away;—we are to sign the
Reuben tried to make me
cessity, but it was labour
Laura, cheer up, and tell
merry, amusing lawyer;—
had seen him before I p
expects to be a great man,
the Westwell family exp
think him very clever, an
things, and makes such de
heigh ho! perhaps I migh
lady instead of a farmer's
a take in of Reuben's to
went to Westwell. I had
promised to have him.”

"Do you think he would? I've a great mind to try. Ah! but then you see it would require more time than we have to spare, so we may as well let things go on as they are, though it may be a great loss to——"

"I hear the trampling of horses," said Mrs. Weston.

"And I," returned Lucy, "see the whole cavalcade. Mercy, Laura, they are coming! But don't look so frightened, nor turn so pale—perhaps they may not send for us."

Laura made no reply, but prepared to obey the summons, which was speedily brought, with fortitude. With a beating heart but firm step, she accompanied Lucy, who was even more agitated than herself: both were equally terrified when they entered the library: they were too frightened themselves to notice the rest of the party, or they might have seen faces as grave as their own, though not wearing the same pallid hue.

Sir Edward advanced and led Laura to a

chair, while Reuben, more the same office for Lucy, sprung forward, and, as Laura, seemed very much in hand from him; and it was pleasanter, she declared, to between him and Reuben than Greek and Latin, for it was one could understand, not even self, for once or twice while he looked puzzled, as if he had at the tip of his tongue.

The long list of technical ended, and the lawyer put the hand.

"You will write your name land."

Walter obeyed, without thought but when Evelyn also took the his signature, it struck Walter that premature. "Surely," said he, to Deverel, "I have done wrong:

ness, I should not have signed my name before Mr. Meredith."

"It is all right; you saw Mr. Meredith sign his—that is quite sufficient."

Walter made no reply, thankful that one of his trials was over: the next day would end all, and he trusted that he should bear an inevitable evil with firmness and composure.

The documents signed and sealed, the ladies retired, and the gentlemen returned to their respective homes. "Stupid enough," as Lucy observed; "they might have stayed and been a little cheerful, if only to enliven them.—I don't wish ever to listen to law terms again; so I hope Reuben will live till we get old and cross."

"You may as well leave out that part of the concern, Lucy."

"Well, we'll try, Madame Weston."

"And in the mean time, go to bed, Lucy; remember you are to be up early—there is more time required to dress a bride than another per-

son, but Margaret will t
times. Poor Margaret!
happy; she was afraid
would be sent for to de
and you, Lucy: but now
all the trouble, she is qui
wonder, she has been in
to her usual way.—Well,
go to bed; and yet, Lucy,
at times I cannot help cry
are going to leave the M
sweet Laura; it will be a
are both gone.—I dread
almost wish Mr. Meredeth
boy we thought him, when
then he would have had no
go to: for my own part I th
well grander than Astol H
very dull. You must not for
you are mistress of the Gra
visiting, you will often co
House, will you not?"

Lucy's tears flowed fast as she thanked Mrs. Weston for her constant care and kindness, which assured her she should ever remember her. "You know one cannot forget one's mother; and Reuben thinks the same, and loves you dearly, Madame Weston; and you will come to the Grange to see us, and we shall all be happy, I am sure; and Westwell is a very short distance, and we shall see Laura very often. So you must not grieve, or else I shall be cross with Reuben for thinking of marrying."

"Oh, no; you will find too much difficulty in that," said Mrs. Weston. "You must be a proper vixen to find fault with one so kind and good as Reuben Barwell."

"Reuben ever had your good word; so, if we do quarrel, I shall not find a friend in you."

"No, indeed. I shall always say it is your fault; but now to bed, dear Lucy, and heaven bless you! I must go to my other child; I wish my mind was as easy about her as it is about you, Lucy."

"What young ladies do you mean, Margaret?"

"Miss Wilson and Miss Dixey."

"Oh, I forgot them; but must I really rise?"

"You must, indeed, Miss, or we shall not be ready."

Most joyfully did Lucy obey, pretending all the time to find fault with Margaret for calling her so early on a cold morning. "Why, I declare, Laura, you are half dressed! Well, while you sit down in your dressing-gown by the fire, I will get ready for Margaret to arrange my hair after she has done yours. It is an ill omen for a bride to dress her own hair, is it not, Margaret?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Miss, but I should like to do every thing this day for you and Miss Laura."

"Then I'm sure you shall, Margaret, more particularly as—heigh-ho! I'm almost afraid I begin to repent. Margaret, which do you like best—Mr. Deverel or my Reuben?"

"La, Miss, what a question! Why, I've

— If you go by that rule
love your old gowns better
and no true woman ever did
doctrine, Laura ought to
than Mr. Meredeth, because
him from the time she was

A faint smile passed over
which encouraged Lucy to
think, Laura, that Reuben
if I were to ask him to have
to wait a month or so, what
ment ? ”

“ What experiment ? ”

“ Why, just to try whether
you be in earnest or not.
person, and I think a woman
happy with such a merry
ben is sometimes grave—”

peal!—and what a noise the dogs make! This must be some stranger; do, Margaret, run to the gallery window, and see who ‘knocks so loud and knocks so late,’—no, that won’t do, ‘early’ is the word;—but, Laura, tell me seriously, shall I jilt Reuben?”

“My dear Lucy, how can you talk such nonsense, and on so serious a day!”

“Serious! Why is it serious? Well, there I’ve made you laugh—that will do; and here comes Margaret. Only a horseman—oh, the Meredith livery;—well, run down again, good Margaret, and learn what brings him here at this unseasonable hour.”

Margaret departed, and soon returned with looks of dismay, and said, the man brought a packet for her master.

“Why, I thought you had seen a ghost, Margaret, you look so pale and ghastly.”

“I’ve not seen a ghost, Miss; but I have heard something very terrible.”

“Indeed! what is it, pray?”

"Dead!"

"Yes, dead. He died just when he had embarked

"If the account of his death is more correct than the report of his death, he is alive now, Margaret," said she, "and he is to be here at ten; therefore Mr. Deverel's story must be a mistake."

"Well, Miss, I'm sure I shall not be disappointed; for if the report had been true, it would have put a stop to the wedding, and the wedding should not be stopped at this time."

"Then I'm sure, Margaret, that there will be no stoppage to-day."

"I thought, Lucy," said she, "that you were wishing for some delay, and that you were waiting for Mr. Deverel?"

same Mr. Reuben Barwell has strange notions about female propriety : so, perhaps, I may as well rest contented, because, if I don't marry Reuben, he will break his heart : and, poor fellow ! that would be a pity too ;—he is very well in his way. Another interruption !—see what they want, Margaret."

Margaret gave a sealed packet to Laura, who opened it, and after reading a few lines, she turned pale, then red, and at length of a deadly paleness. Lucy and Margaret both ran to assist her, but she did not faint ; she had all the agony of faintness, without the forgetfulness. Lucy was too frightened to ask the cause, and it was out of Margaret's way to question at any time. Laura was the first to recover composure. " I am better, dear Lucy, and I will lie down for a few minutes."

" Lie down," thought Lucy, " when the bridegroom ought to be on his road ! ' This looks not like a wedding ! ' I tremble to think of it—without it is put off for ever, and then I wonder if my——"

ceived myself once ; but my eyes are now opened, —not only the eye of love, but the observation of indifference can discover, that I am not beloved as I would wish, or as Laura can love. Your affection for me is that of a sister to a dearly-loved brother, and such I will learn to be. But think not, if that were all, I would forego the hope of that esteem hereafter wearing the deeper hue of love. Oh, if I could have so flattered myself!—but no, no—you may not be aware of the strength of your feelings, dearest Laura, but your heart is another's. I would not wound your delicacy, but it is essential to my purpose that I should be explicit. You love Walter Rayland—you love the preserver of yourself and your father—the generous friend who, when he believed me of outcast race, yet pitied and promised me his protection, his friendship. I knew you were dear to him ; but I had no means of forming a positive opinion respecting your sentiments ;—and when I was an inmate at Astol, and months, nay years, passed away, and he

intervened to prevent my
being fulfilled.

" I believe, Laura, the
marriage; and if so, fate
strange that Mr. Rayland
have formed so great an i
out having an idea that
dock was familiar to eith
and lately circumstances
a suspicion, that had you
me, Mr. Rayland would h
But let me do justice to
was not final till this last
released you sooner. No
part is ended, and I have
happiness, your bliss. L
disturb your peace; rathe
escaped the distraction of

flection that you were only content!—only resigned!—No, no, sweetest Laura, I am not so selfish;—your love must be restored to its first possessor, and I shall find my reward, my comfort, in your felicity. I shall travel for some years, and if we ever meet again, my love shall be the love of a brother.

“ Before I close this letter, I must explain one piece of deception : my present conduct was suggested and confirmed by a circumstance that occurred only yesterday morning ; it was too late to explain all, and pursue the plan I hastily conceived. I had merely time to secure Mr. Deverel's co-operation, and I trust my scheme will meet the sanction of Mr. Penruddock. I communicated my decision and intention to my father ; happily they met his approbation. With Mr. Deverel's assistance, the settlements were drawn in your name, and in place of mine you will find that of the man most to be envied in this world. If I have in this point done what you do not approve, forgive me, dearest Laura.

I could not, I dared not
you expressed what I kn
I should have been lost,
my purpose. Farewel
beings—farewell, my ev
meet again, these feeli
friendship. Should tha
farewell for ever;—and
for your happiness.

Lucy's tears fell fast a
she had disliked the ma
a sincere regard for
wished, she could not hel
ing, that some unforesee
Evelyn back, and that
and united to Laura. A
other feelings rushed in,

Walter would be the husband of Laura;—now another idea rose in her mind, what would Laura think of all this? She had not spoken since she gave her the letter to read, and it was impossible to judge by her countenance, which had the fixed composure that is caused by overpowering feelings, too great to permit any expression—where the features exhibit the stagnation of the mind, which is wholly overcome by the intensity of its sensations. She could not decide if the communication had given her pain or pleasure. Lucy began to tremble, and almost believed that she had mistaken the nature of Laura's attachment, and that she did love Evelyn: if so, they were rather in an awkward predicament. But Lucy's fears on the subject gradually subsided: as Laura recovered from the stupor that oppressed her faculties, it was very evident that if her manner did not speak of pleasure, she certainly seemed very far from wretchedness; and Lucy was satisfied there was no regret, save for the sorrow

Evelyn might endure,—
spoken by either on the
dock sent for his daughter
and private interview, in
her, that, with the letter
him, came one also from
proposals, but at the same
settlements so romantical
and soon after Deverell
House with all the papers
he placed in Mr. Penru
the sentiments of his daughter
and his own consent given

“ And what is to become
thought Lucy : “ it has been
I am not very superstitious
like so many interruptions
possible for her's to take place
and the report of the Council
soon afterwards confirmed,
still more imperative : it
decent to have a joyful

after the loss of so near a member of the Westwell family.

The inhabitants of the Hall were in a state of extreme agitation. Before Sir Edward parted with his sister, he endeavoured to persuade her to remain with him; but the Lady Bertini still loved her husband, even though she had long ceased to esteem or respect his character: she had bitterly mourned his unworthy aim on the Merry Wood Dale estate, which he did not attempt to conceal from her, though nothing but the certainty that the liberty, or perhaps the life of her nephew was in danger, could have prompted her to take such measures as led to the rescue of Evelyn.

The Count put some restraint on his words and conduct while at the Hall. A sneering, sarcastic manner he exhibited to those with whom he had occasion to speak, but when on board the yacht the tempest burst forth uncontrolled, unrestrained;—in vain his terrified, his subdued wife endeavoured to soothe and pacify

told her he had no love for her
that when he first met her he
believed she was the only one
and it was not till he had
too far even for his trifling
retract, that he heard she
consequently was not the
supposed; he cursed the
her parents for encouraging
to be revenged when they
the Count could not foresee
such display of power was
that the violence of his
safety of his wife. Selfish
possession of the best of
Countess she must arrange
could. The poor forlorn J

indulged and idolized hope of her parents. Long and bitterly did she lament the conduct of her husband, and grieve that she could no longer conceal his real character from those by whom she wished him to be loved and respected. She had been content to appear cold, reserved, and heartless, so that the man she loved might stand high in the world's estimation, fondly hoping that he would "grow to what he seemed." She made no attempt to court repose; the hours passed unnoticed, and day would have found her in the same situation had she not been suddenly roused by a noise in her husband's cabin: rushing in haste to his cot, she found him in a most dreadful state; he had broken a blood-vessel, and before medical aid could be sent for, or indeed before the boat could be lowered, he expired, ending his life as he had lived, the victim of his passions.

The Countess forgot her sorrows, forgot the ill usage she had received, and mourned as if he

had been the tenderest, the best. Sir Edward hastened to comfort her, and to give her what assistance the case required. He was buried with the Westwell, though the Lady Bertini sincerely loved him. In loss, yet, in spite of herself and her own dismay, she grew cheerful again. At first she detested the feeling of grief that crept over her, "it was profanation of her early love;" but vain as it was, it did not to nourish grief when the mind is free. She had now no fear, no dread, and, to her desire, she was happy.

Among the Count's papers there were many letters, and documents that explained the manner in which he had been deceived. The feelings of Sir Edward, Lady Mordaunt, and the unfortunate Florence: his insinuations, of the most minute nature, the hue; had they been more glaring, they would inevitably have failed;—as it was, t

of the daily trifles employed by the Count prevented their detection; but when once there was a clew, all was clear, all was explained;—and Mr. Penruddock found that a system of villany had been pursued, which it was impossible for a pure mind even to conceive or believe feasible. This discovery removed a weight of misery from the mind of Mr. Penruddock: it was not his conduct that had driven his wife to temporary insanity; she was still a victim, but not destroyed by his want of caution;—true, she was destroyed, if not murdered, but he was not the murderer; and though he still mourned, yet his grief was deprived of its bitterness.

It need scarcely be said, that Evelyn's romantic arrangement was not made in vain: at the expiration of one month the ceremony was performed, when the determination of Walter and Laura to reside entirely at the Manor House gave unmingled satisfaction to its inmates. Mr. Penruddock became less solitary,

which she had prayed for
witness.

Years have passed—yet
inhabitants of Astol,—but
happiness, not unmixed with
the death of Mr. Pen
affliction; with those who
the grief which, though
alleviated by submission
even, was yet ever at his
not to be deplored: and
witnessed the peaceful
moments, felt that to w
age would be selfish,
Walter Rayland, with e

last moments recurred to him—and, fortunately for him, they often did recur—then Walter would feel that his happiness, great as it was, was not to be compared to the blissful hope of a death-bed. He might have hesitated, had he been required to relinquish all that made existence a blessing; but to repose on the couch of death, with the joyful serenity of Mr. Penruddock, he was constrained to acknowledge was worth the short term of human existence.

And Evelyn—the sensitive, generous, romantic Evelyn—he still remains with his father in Italy, whose unbounded admiration of his son's conduct is only equalled by his affection. There is a similarity in their attachments and sufferings, that draws them closer than even the tie of relationship. Sir Edward receives satisfaction, if not happiness, in his daily endeavours to make his son forget the neglect of his infancy; and Evelyn finds composure in the consciousness of having preferred the felicity of another to his

a satisfaction almost suff
him for the sacrifice of his

THE E







